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TRENDS

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**Rural Libraries and
Information Services**

**Patricia LaCaille John
Issue Editor**

**University of Illinois
Graduate School of Library
and Information Science**

LIBRARY TRENDS

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"RURAL LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION
SERVICES"

EDITED BY PATRICIA LACAILLE JOHN

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L I B R A R Y

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Rural Libraries and Information Services

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Introduction*

PATRICIA LACAILLE JOHN

FIFTEEN YEARS HAVE ELAPSED since the publication of the last *Library Trends* issue on rural public library service. Many of the concerns identified in rural areas and libraries in the 1970s still exist and are discussed in this later issue. For example, rural families still have a lower income than the national average. Also, rural citizens—including librarians—attain a lower level of education. Rural communities have a higher poverty rate and have less access to health services. Rural citizens are older. Rural communities have fewer resources for services and libraries (Drennan & Drennan, 1980, pp. 493-512).

During the 1980s, many rural communities continued to experience these trends in addition to a severe economic recession. In general, rural areas saw economic and population growth during the 1970s while experiencing coinciding downturns in several natural resource-based industries—agriculture, mining and energy, and manufacturing—resulting in widespread economic distress, unemployment, and population loss in the 1980s.

As a result of the economic distress of the 1980s, rural communities saw how closely their economies are tied to the global economy. They further realized the need to diversify to make themselves more competitive in maintaining the economic health of their communities. The economic crisis made rural citizens increasingly aware of the critical need for accurate and timely information, of the value of information as a tool in economic development, of the growing information gap between rural and urban areas, and of the need for the same information access as their urban counterparts.

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Both the past and present issues of *Library Trends* on rural library service emphasize the continuing importance of new information technology and electronic networks to rural libraries and communities. The earlier issue examined cooperative electronic cataloging and interlibrary loan networks. This issue focuses on the need for rural libraries to provide access to electronic community information systems or civic networks, free nets, and, most important, to Internet in order to narrow isolation by instantly linking rural areas to worldwide information resources on any topic.

Books and reports focusing on a rural theme almost always raise the question, "What is rural?" The responses generate both quantitative and qualitative definitions. Federal agencies are unable to agree on a uniform definition of rural that meets all their individual rural program criteria. The Bureau of the Census definition—one of the three primary federal rural classification system definitions (the other two being from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service)—is probably the most common. Under the bureau's definition, all communities with a population of less than 2,500 outside of an urbanized area are considered rural. Using the 1990 census, the bureau definition classifies 61.7 million, or 25 percent, of the total population as rural and 97.5 percent of the total U.S. land area as rural (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1993, p. 26).

Further complicating any attempt to agree on a definition that fits all rural areas is the diverse nature of rural communities. U.S. Department of Agriculture officials acknowledge that "any attempt to comprehensively 'define' Rural America should be a task unto itself and would require much more ink and effort than is available for this project. Because of the obvious complexity of such an enterprise no attempt will be made for this report to pen any such definition" (Lyng & Vautour, 1989, p. 11).

Although rural communities "vary widely in geography, economic base, and labor force characteristics,...[they] do have certain features in common: small-scale, low-density populations; remoteness from urban centers; and economies narrowly dependent on one or two industries" (Salant & Marx, 1995, p. 11). Other policymakers and researchers pondering a definition of rural may conclude that it is "a concept beyond definition" (Rios, 1988, p. 2), a state of mind, or "if you think you are rural, you're rural" ("What is Rural?" 1994, p. 7).

The articles in this issue examine the economic and social challenges to rural America; the information needs of rural communities; the role of the rural library; library funding sources; staff and trustee leadership; staff development; information delivery services; outreach programs and partnerships; additional electronic information resources; and future prospects for rural libraries.

SOCIOECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

Sara Mazie and Linda Ghelfi review the economic and social issues currently impacting rural America. They stress the importance of rural areas having access to information to achieve global competitiveness be-

cause information is an integral ingredient for successful economic development. Furthermore, they point out that, because rural libraries exist in nearly all rural counties, they stand as ready resources to provide access to the information superhighway.

INFORMATION NEEDS

Bernard Vavrek emphasizes how important it is for community libraries to obtain organized timely feedback from their customers. Rural libraries must know and meet customer information needs and market their services to the community. Vavrek voices concern that the institutional library may be swept away by Internet and other online resources as the information superhighway becomes more democratized—a prospect that does not guarantee libraries customers when potential customers may easily set up a direct information account through a private source.

TRUSTEE'S ROLE

John Christenson recognizes that the rural library trustee plays a key role in the future survival of rural libraries by ensuring that they have the resources and capabilities to meet the information requirements of their community. He emphasizes that rural trustees may ensure the library's survival by providing adequate funding and leadership, encouraging partnerships, supporting marketing programs, and promoting and supporting new information technologies—especially Internet access.

LIBRARY FUNDING

Mark Merrifield examines federal and state roles, responsibilities, and funding sources that encourage rural library development. He points out the importance of the *Library Services Act of 1956* that provided rural library grants to improve library service for Americans both with or without adequate library service. Merrifield proposes changes in the federal and state government funding role to ensure adequate library service to all citizens.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Dan Barron contends that well-trained and competent staff are essential to a successful library program. He stresses that rural libraries need to change their public perception from one of being a warehouse to one of being an information service. Rural libraries must market themselves as the community information provider and then be able to deliver the expected level of service. Rural libraries need educational assistance to change the public's perception and provide new services. Barron contends that it is impossible to expect the current configuration of library schools to meet all the education and training needs of rural library and

information providers often scattered over great distances. He therefore proposes meeting rural library educational needs by creating a virtual campus through distance education.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES

Ristiina Wigg points out that, because most rural libraries have only one or two full-time equivalent staff, it is not surprising that rural librarians—many with limited formal library science education—often double as the children's librarian. In communities with few public facilities for children's activities except the local school, the rural librarian is in a position to influence, motivate, and foster lifelong learning behavior in rural children. It is essential, therefore, that rural libraries have properly trained staff and resources to stimulate and challenge children. Wigg advocates a rural library action plan based on cooperation among rural librarians, system level staff, state-level consultants, and national organizations to assist rural librarians in utilizing existing resources in providing and expanding children and young people's services.

OUTREACH PROGRAMS

Judith Boyce and Bert Boyce point out that rural libraries, most of which are underfunded and understaffed, face the additional financial burden of providing library outreach programs to patrons unlikely or unable to reach the library. These libraries often serve sparse populations scattered over large geographic areas. The Boyces survey traditional rural library outreach services, traditional services incorporating newer technologies, and new outreach activities utilizing advanced technologies. Rural library outreach may range from the personal delivery of materials for the disabled to online access in a bookmobile. They also examine rural outreach programs sponsored by colleges, universities, and national libraries.

MULTITYPE LIBRARY COOPERATIVES

Jan Ison discusses the growth of library cooperation in the United States, which is a twentieth-century phenomenon that greatly escalated in the late 1950s with funding support from the *Library Services Act of 1956*. She contends that cooperative partnerships will succeed only if their fundamental principle is to achieve results for the patron. Ison examines the roles of multitype cooperatives in rural libraries, the services and benefits that a cooperative library service provides to its members, the roles of the rural library in the cooperative organization, and the services and benefits that the rural library contributes to the cooperative. She concludes with a discussion of future challenges facing rural libraries, including the need for rapid response to change and the lack of affordable telecommunications access, adequate funding, and well-trained staff.

RURAL INFORMATION CENTER (RIC)

Patricia John focuses on RIC services and partnerships and provides examples of the questions being asked by rural citizens. RIC provides information to rural citizens and communities and to officials responsible for rural programs at all levels of government—tribal, local, state, and federal. RIC networks with state libraries and supports the information needs of rural libraries lacking specialized information resources.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS ACCESS

Steve Cisler stresses the importance for rural librarians' involvement in community efforts to provide telecommunications access to electronic information networks, especially Internet. He points out that, whereas computer expertise is not essential, involvement in the community planning process is and will generate a positive perception of the library's role and involvement in the community. Cisler discusses several examples of current electronic telecommunications networking projects in rural communities and provides several different technology options for community consideration.

FUTURE TRENDS

Glen Holt surveys the major forces and trends he sees affecting the future of rural libraries. He also examines changes in rural libraries, including the impact of the changing service expectations of library customers. If libraries fail to meet their customers' changing information needs, they may lose customers to private sector services. He emphasizes the importance for rural libraries to know their users, survey their information requirements and, most important, meet them. To achieve this goal, libraries will need to devote a larger portion of their budget to obtain new information technology, especially Internet access, and provide sufficient funds for training staff to use the new technologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The authors provide several recurring recommendations for rural libraries and their state library, cooperative organization, or other library partners to address in order to ensure long-term survival. Rural libraries must:

- identify and meet customers' information needs;
- market library services;
- provide community leadership and/or participation in acquiring new information technology;
- encourage and acquire both traditional and new library partners to assist in providing new resources, services, and capabilities such as telecommunications access;

- shift focus and budgets from collection development and ownership to electronic access, Internet connectivity, and staff training in new technologies;
- provide localized community information and outreach programs; and
- change the community's perception so libraries are viewed as the community's chief information resource.

Rural libraries must accommodate change and meet the challenges that the new information technology presents so that they will not be left behind or, worse, not survive.

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Challenges of the Rural Environment in a Global Economy

SARA MILLS MAZIE AND LINDA M. GHELFI

ABSTRACT

INFORMATION HAS BECOME A CRITICAL part of successful economic development for individuals, businesses, and communities. Lack of access to information was at least partially responsible for rural America's inability to keep up with urban increases in population, high-wage occupations, income, and education levels during the 1980s. Among rural areas, growth in farming-dependent counties and persistent poverty counties was hindered by their remoteness from major metro areas. At the other end of the spectrum, rural high-amenity and retirement-destination counties had the advantage of attractive amenities, and rural counties adjacent to large metro areas benefited from their ties to the major centers of information. Nearly all rural counties contain public libraries, some of which are already telecommunications linked. With funding for infrastructure and human capital improvements, more rural libraries could serve as links in improving rural access to the information highway and the knowledge transported on that highway.

INTRODUCTION

Access to information and its effective use as knowledge are critical elements of successfully living in today's world. Moreover, this fact is increasingly recognized as equally true for people, businesses, and communities. The much touted Information Age is very real. In an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Peter Drucker (1994) writes about the world transformation into a knowledge society: "Increasingly, an educated person

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will be somebody who has learned how to learn, and who continues learning, especially by formal education, throughout his or her lifetime [and] ...how well an individual, an organization, an industry, a country, does in acquiring and applying knowledge will become the key competitive factor" (pp. 66-67).

Information is just as critical a resource for people, businesses, and communities in rural areas as it is for those in urban areas. In the past, being removed from the daily hustle and bustle of urban society was not particularly important in the economic and social life in rural America. Now, instant access to information on financial markets, new technological innovations, developments in medical research, and changing conditions in global markets are critical to the economic viability of rural businesses and communities. But the characteristics of being rural—especially small population bases and relative remoteness from large metro areas which are the centers of information flows—make it hard for rural communities, residents, governments, and businesses to access information and to translate that information into useful knowledge. This intersection of the importance of information with rural areas' difficulty in effectively accessing it is a central challenge for rural areas in the Information Age.

How well rural areas are able to respond to this information challenge will play a major role in determining the future well-being of rural people and their communities. Access to, and use of, information will not guarantee a prosperous future, but its absence will almost certainly sentence rural areas to an even more secondary role in the life of the nation than they have today.

Rural libraries, in facilitating access to, and use of, information, can and are playing a critical role in responding to the challenges of the Information Age. Several articles in this issue and last year's *Library Trends* article by Senkevitch and Wolfram (1994) provide a wealth of information on current telecommunications efforts by rural libraries and suggestions for establishing more rural libraries as integral players in the dissemination of knowledge about, and information from, network sources.

Given the diversity found across rural America, rural libraries' participation almost certainly does and will vary from place to place. Even similar places will have to tailor their responses to unique local circumstances. An understanding of broader national trends in the evolution of rural America and its economy will help inform the many decisions that will need to be made by libraries, local governments, and other disseminators or users of information in designing an information system that will effectively serve rural America.

RURAL AMERICA FELL BEHIND DURING THE 1980s

In the aggregate, rural America did not fare well in the 1980s. The major characteristics that define being rural—small places, low population density, and remoteness from large metro areas—were working to

make it particularly hard for rural economies to effectively compete in national and global markets. The problems of the 1980s are reflected in many of the standard measures of well-being. Slow population growth; outmigration; lagging employment, income, and earnings growth; and slowly improving educational attainment were all experienced by rural America. The changing industrial and occupational structure of employment in rural areas and the concomitant decline in rural wages appear to have been a primary cause of the widening gap between rural and urban conditions.

Industrial and Occupational Changes

During the period 1980 to 1990, nonmetro employment growth was relatively slow, 10.5 percent, and much slower than the metro rate of 20.5 percent. The structure of the rural economy, relative to the urban economy, explains at least some of this differential. The overall structure of the rural economy in many ways resembles the urban economy with more than half the jobs in the service sector, and essentially all the employment growth over the last decade in both rural and urban areas was in the service sector. But there are significant differences. The most obvious difference is that farming, agricultural services, forestry, and fishing account for almost 7 percent of nonmetro jobs but less than 2 percent of metro jobs. Rural employment in these industries continued to decline during the 1980s, albeit much more slowly than during earlier decades. In contrast, metro employment increased as more urban-oriented sectors such as lawn and garden services, veterinary services, and greenhouses added jobs.

The share of employment in manufacturing is slightly higher in nonmetro areas, and, while rural employment in the sector declined slightly over the decade, urban manufacturing employment fell much more. However, the growing difference between the industrial and occupational structures of manufacturing jobs in the two areas is even more important. During the 1980s, rural manufacturing employment became more concentrated in routine manufacturing in response to strong competition from within and outside the country. The rural manufacturing sector, traditionally using routinized production methods, found itself squeezed between more urban-based high-value complex manufacturing and routine manufacturing increasing anywhere in the world where there are low wages.

High-value manufacturing tends to be based on short and quick turnaround production runs facilitated by good access to information on new technologies, transportation, and financial and product markets. All of these important ingredients to being competitive in so called "niche markets" are more readily available in urban areas, putting rural manufacturers at a disadvantage. At the same time, the standardization of the

technology of more routine production forces rural manufacturers to compete with manufacturing located in other parts of the world where the cost of labor is low. This competition on both the high end and the low end of manufacturing has left rural areas needing to find a new niche in a very competitive market. Increasing competition from off-shore manufacturers pushed rural wages down while the concentration of complex manufacturing in urban areas widened the disparity in wages between urban and rural areas.

Similar differences in the structure of service sector employment also exist. Rural areas have more than their share of low paying consumer-oriented services, and urban areas have a disproportionate share of higher paying business oriented services. Having been the dominant source of rural job growth in the 1980s, low wage service jobs contributed to the overall decline in rural earnings during the decade.

Earnings and Income

The changing industrial and occupational structure of rural employment helps explain why, even in periods of employment growth, rural earnings have remained depressed. In 1992, nonmetro real earnings per nonfarm job were 9 percentage points lower than they were at their peak level reached in 1978, fourteen years earlier (Ghelfi, 1994). Over the same period, the nonmetro/metro earnings ratio fairly steadily declined from 81 to 73 percent, indicating the extent to which rural workers have lost ground relative to urban workers in the national economy.

After rural areas had made significant progress in narrowing the gap with urban areas during the 1970s, rural income, measured in real median family income, was stagnant (-.6 percent) during the 1980s, even as urban income levels increased modestly (6.4 percent). The net result was that rural income slipped from 78 to 73 percent of the metro level from 1979 to 1989 (Lahr, 1993). Earnings account for more than three-quarters of family income, with dividends, interest, rental income, social security, and other transfer payments accounting for the remainder. So the industrial and occupational trends and their effect on earnings also largely account for stagnant rural income and the widening gap with urban income.

Educational Attainment

Traditionally, the urban population has achieved higher levels of education than the rural population. Over the 1980s, education levels increased substantially in both metro and nonmetro areas; however the metro-nonmetro gap continued. Rural people narrowed the gap somewhat in the share completing a high school education but lost ground in the share of the population that had completed college. In 1990, 13 percent of the nonmetro population had completed college compared to 22.5 percent of their metro counterparts (Parker, 1993).

The better paying managerial, professional, and technical jobs disproportionately found in metro areas typically require higher skills levels and therefore higher levels of education. The enigma associated with that relationship, explored in an article by McGranahan and Ghelfi (1991), is whether the demand for highly skilled workers has drawn the highly educated to metro areas or whether the supply of highly educated workers in metro areas has caused the highly skilled jobs to amass there. On one hand, there is evidence that highly educated rural people migrate to metro areas for work commensurate with their skills. This suggests that if highly skilled jobs had been available in rural areas, more of the highly educated would stay in rural areas, raising rural education levels. On the other hand, there is evidence that businesses needing highly skilled workers tend to locate near one another, drawing a large enough pool of highly educated workers to fill their collective needs. This suggests that rural areas will continue to lose the highly educated because their economies are too small to support such an agglomeration of businesses.

Population and Migration

Higher urban wages and more high-paying jobs have helped fuel a continuation of the out-migration of rural people, particularly youth, during the 1980s. In stark contrast to the net in-migration to rural areas in the 1970s, in the 1980s, roughly 500,000 more people moved out of rural areas than into them (Cromartie, 1993).

Rural outmigration was a major contributor to slow overall population growth in nonmetro areas over the decade. In the aggregate, nonmetro population grew by 2.7 percent compared with 11.8 percent growth in the metro population, and, individually, over half of all nonmetro counties lost population during the 1980s (Ghelfi & Parker, In press). These trends are another indication of the stronger position of the urban economy relative to rural economy.

ACCESS AND ASSETS DIFFERENTIATE RURAL AREAS

Changes occurring in agriculture, manufacturing, and the service sector play out in different ways in different regions, depending on their economic structure as well as their more fundamental characteristics and history. Inevitably, differences among regions, counties, and communities result in great diversity in the rural experience across the country. At the same time, between the aggregate conditions and trends described above and the specifics of individual places are some regional patterns/trends that are useful in considering the future of rural America. Developments in four types of nonmetro counties are particularly noteworthy. Farming-dependent counties, persistent poverty counties, retirement-destination counties, and counties that are adjacent to large metro areas performed very differently during the 1980s.

Farming-Dependent Counties

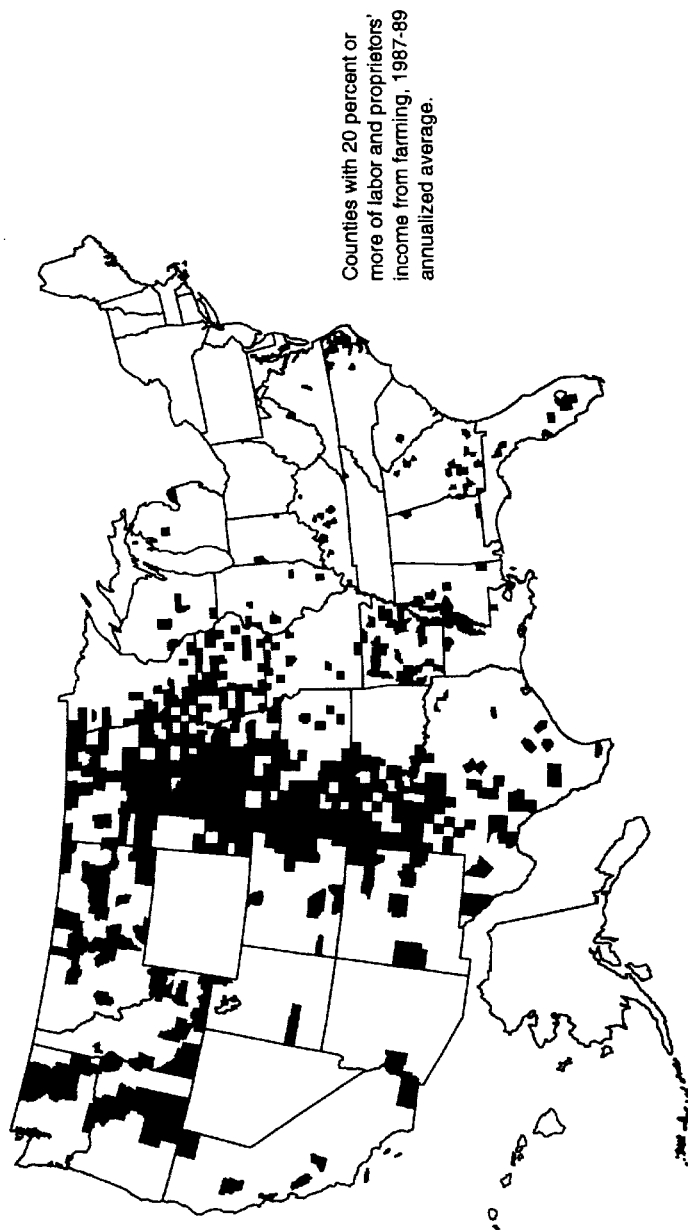
While once most of rural America based its economy on agriculture, today only 556 counties derive 20 percent or more of their earned income from farming (see Map 1). Located principally in the Great Plains, these counties have experienced decades of population outmigration as the demand for jobs in agriculture shrank and no other industry developed a sufficient number of jobs to counterbalance the decline in agriculture.

While the decline in employment in agriculture is a product of increasing productivity, this success has taken its toll on the small rural communities that dotted the countryside. In 1990, two-thirds of the farming-dependent counties had no town with over 2,500 population (Cook & Mizer, 1994). During the 1980s, farming-dependent counties as a whole lost population as significant numbers of people moved away. The resulting small population levels and associated increase in the per person cost of basic public services have placed severe economic stress on the communities and county governments in the region. Recent data for 1990-94 suggest that the population loss and outmigration experienced by these counties may be abating. Whether or not that can be sustained, it seems likely that farming-dependent counties will continue to be challenged by the dual disadvantages of dependency on an industry with shrinking employment needs and very small communities removed from major metropolitan centers.

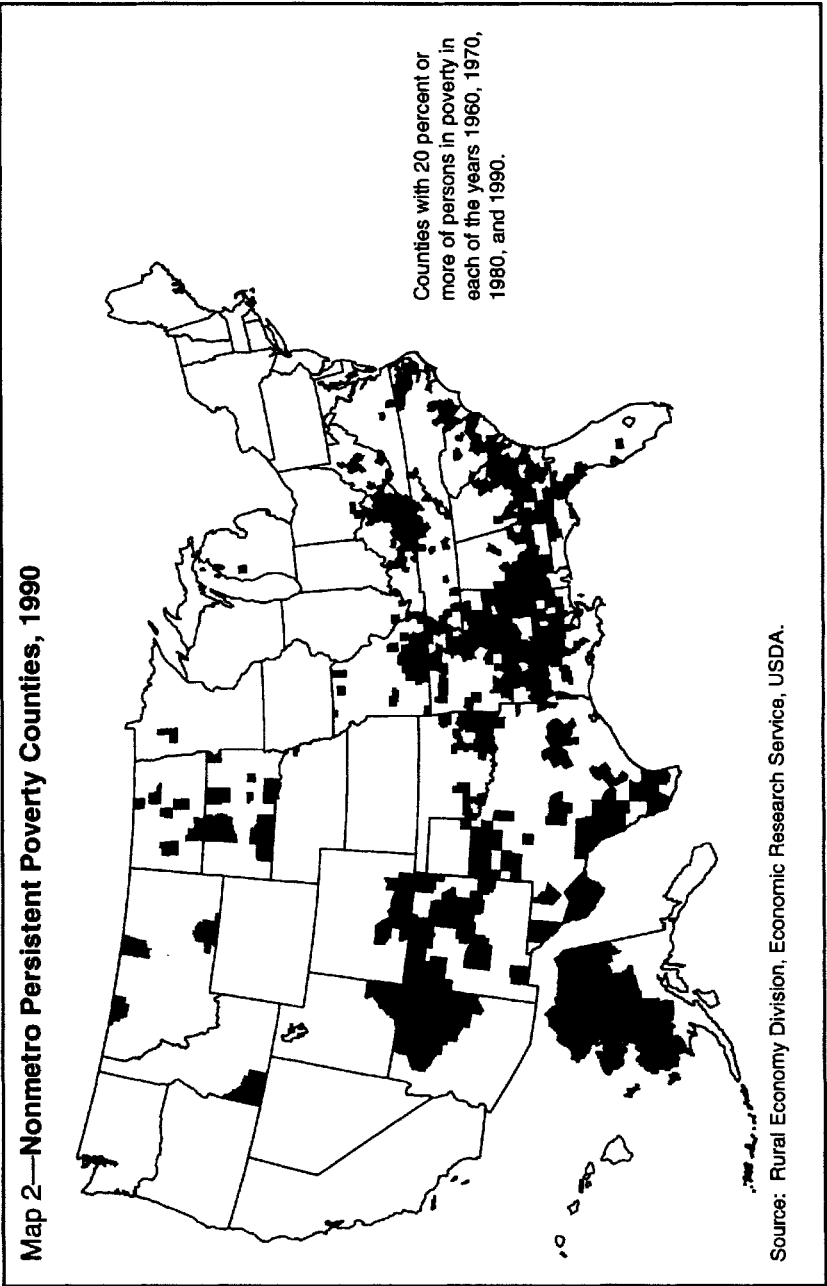
Persistent Poverty Counties

The persistence of high levels of poverty defines a second set of counties. Found principally in the South, these 535 counties had 20 percent of their population with income below the poverty level in 1960, 1970, 1980, and 1990 (see Map 2). In 1990, the poverty rates in these counties ranged from 20 to 63 percent with an average of 29 percent (Cook & Mizer, 1994). In these counties, poverty defines not only the experience of many families but also of many communities. The populations have unusually high levels of people with characteristics that make them prone to economic disadvantage, such as low educational levels and living in female-headed households. Many of these people are not equipped to participate effectively in today's economy. Earnings per job were much lower in persistent poverty counties than in nonmetro counties overall in 1989, suggesting that even if a significant share of the poverty population are working, their low earnings are not enough to raise their family out of poverty. The size of the poverty population in these counties leads to a community-level experience of economic disadvantage and a struggle to provide the community with basic public services such as good school systems, good water and waste water systems, and adequate health care services.

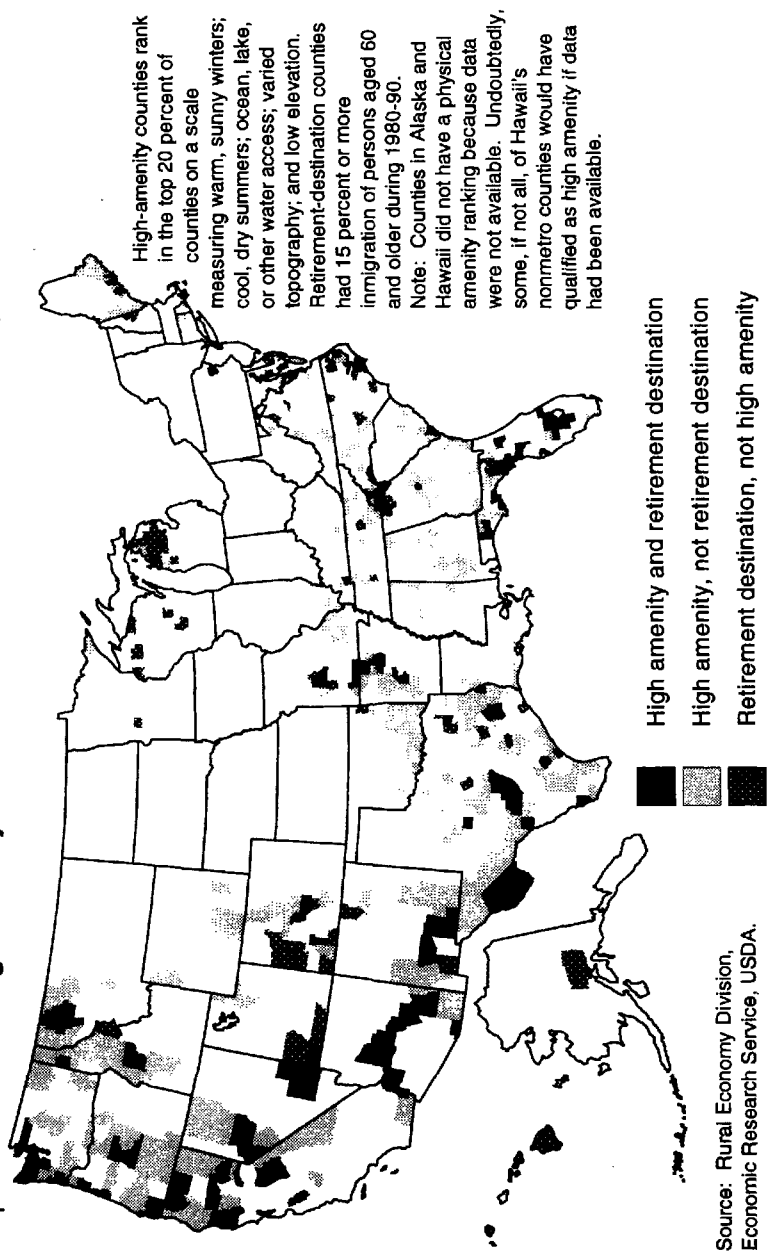
Map 1—Nonmetro Farming-Dependent Counties, 1989



Source: Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, USDA.



Map 3—Nonmetro High-Amenity and Retirement-Destination Counties, 1990



High-Amenity and Retirement-Destination Counties

A third set of counties is defined by their high level of physical amenities. High-amenity counties rank in the top 20 percent of nonmetro counties on the basis of relatively warm sunny winters; cool dry summers; ocean, lake, or other water access; varied topography; and low elevation (McGranahan, 1993). The 404 counties in this group are naturally concentrated along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts (see Map 3). Just as the rich soil and conducive growing conditions of the Plains and the coal deposits of Appalachia in earlier times strongly influenced their development, good climate and scenic surroundings have recently influenced the development of the high amenity counties.

Over the last two decades, high-amenity counties captured a disproportionate share of rural population growth and generated a disproportionate share of rural jobs. During the 1980s, the population of high-amenity counties grew 12 percent compared with less than 3 percent growth in nonmetro counties overall. Employment in high-amenity counties grew 20 percent, nearly twice as fast as in nonmetro counties overall.

While there is reason to anticipate that retirement-, tourism-, and recreation-related activities in these counties will continue to generate new employment, there is less reason for optimism that such activity will help to counter the underlying problem of low earnings and wages that is found throughout much of rural America. The down side of job growth in high-amenity counties is that the service jobs associated with the expanding activities tend to be low wage.

Data on a set of retirement-destination counties that are predominantly also high-amenity counties illustrate the relationship between employment and earnings growth in economies that are dependent upon retirees and others attracted by natural amenities. The retirement-destination counties are so named because they experienced 15 percent or more growth in the population sixty and older due to immigration during the 1980s. The 190 counties in this group are concentrated along the coasts, overlapping considerably with the high-amenity counties (see Map 3). The number of jobs in the average retirement-destination county increased 34 percent during 1979-89, three times the 11 percent growth in the average nonmetro county (Cook & Mizer, 1994). Service sector jobs increased even more rapidly—65 percent in the average retirement-destination county compared with 37 percent in the average nonmetro county. After a decade of outstanding job growth, earnings per job in the average retirement-destination county stood at \$17,603 in 1989, still 5 percent less than the average nonmetro county's earnings. So while the success in population growth and job creation in these counties and the high-amenity counties suggests that they are well positioned to capitalize on the new and growing market for vacation and retirement experiences, that new economic activity is likely to reinforce, not remedy, the underlying rural problem of low earnings.

Counties Adjacent to Large Metro Areas

While growth in retirement counties and other counties with physical amenities is largely based on the desire of people to enjoy a lifestyle and engage in activities not available in big cities, many other rural counties adjacent to big cities also are experiencing economic and population growth because the adjacency brings with it the ability to take advantage of economic opportunities found in those cities. For people it means jobs. For businesses, it means quick access to information, markets, and technical assistance, all of which facilitate quick response to opportunities and problems, one of the keys to effectively running a business.

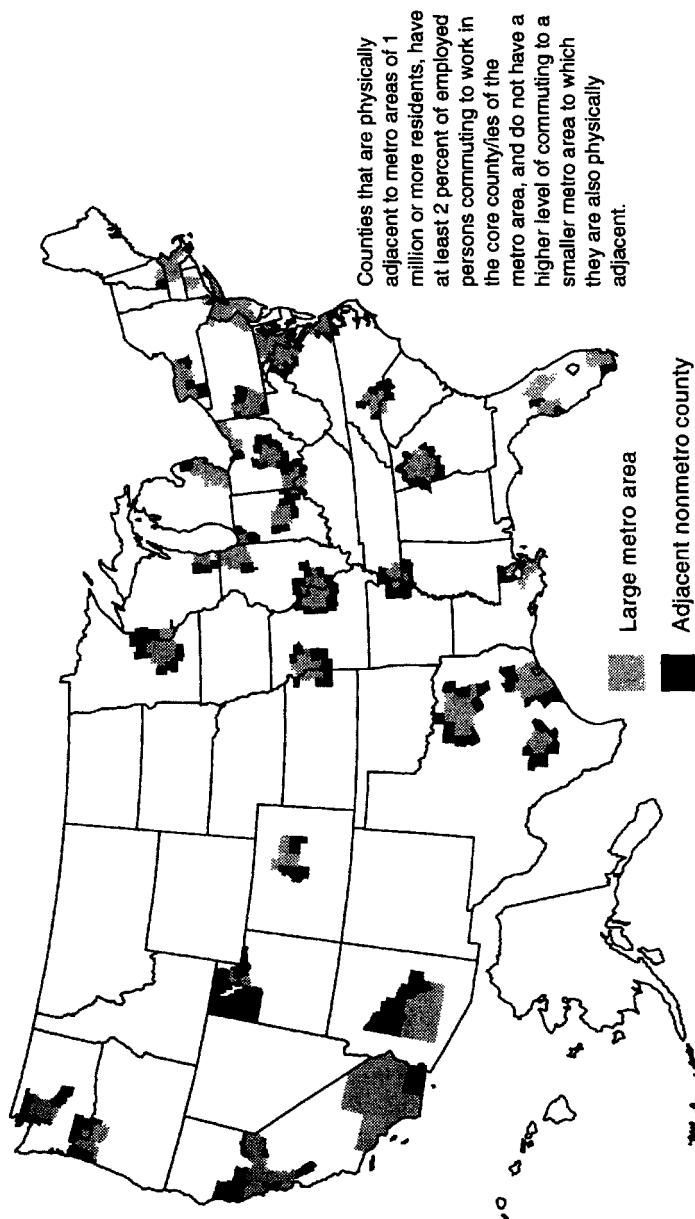
There were 186 nonmetro counties that met the Economic Research Service's definition of adjacency to large metro areas (population of 1 million or more) in 1990 (see Map 4). The adjacency criteria include physically abutting the metro area and also having workers commute to the metro area's core counties. These classification rules explain why most large metro areas are not completely ringed by adjacent nonmetro counties. Statistics on both population and employment growth in adjacent counties support the importance of linkage to metro areas in promoting economic activity. In the 1980s, the population of counties adjacent to large metro areas grew more than twice as fast as the total nonmetro population—7.5 percent compared with 2.7 percent—and twice as fast as those nonmetro counties adjacent to smaller metro areas (Ghelfi & Parker, *In press*). The same pattern of growth differentials existed for employment over the 1980s, but the differences in growth rates were not as large. The faster growth in rural areas bordering large metro areas suggests the powerful advantage of being connected to metropolitan economies and the need to help rural areas overcome their isolation if they are to be competitive in the national and international economies.

CONCLUSIONS

The overall picture emerging from this analysis of the demographic and socioeconomic trends of rural America is that the basic character of being rural places rural areas at a serious disadvantage in the national economy. The absence of economies of scale and the remoteness from metro areas in combination seriously impede the creation of highly skilled, high-paying jobs in rural areas. The information superhighway is one means to overcome that liability by making information that is available in metro areas also available in rural areas. The challenge to rural areas is to make sure that their people, businesses, and communities have access to that information superhighway and, once on the highway, know how to use it to improve their status.

Expenditures data from the 1987 Census of Governments indicate that nearly all rural counties supported libraries, spending an average of \$142,000. The 1992 survey of public libraries by the National Center for

Map 4—Nonmetro Counties Adjacent to Large Metro Areas, 1990



Source: Rural Economy Division, Economic Research Service, USDA.

Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, confirms that nearly all rural counties (97.4 percent) have at least one public library outlet (central or branch library or bookmobile service), averaging 3.3 outlets per rural county. Even 96.8 percent of the most remote rural counties (defined as nonmetro counties that are not adjacent to a metro area and do not contain a city with 10,000 or more residents) have at least one public library outlet.

As other articles in this issue and those by Senkevitch and Wolfram (1994), the Office of Technology Assessment (1991), the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (1994), and the National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation (1994) point out, most rural libraries need funding for infrastructure improvements to obtain computers and online access to data, text, and video information sources. They also need funds to invest in their staff, training them in computer operations so that they can facilitate rural libraries' transitions into telecommunications nodes. The authors of many of those reports maintain that this transition is a natural evolution of the information dissemination role that libraries were designed to play when print was the only medium.

A small grant program, the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program (TIIA), administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration at the U.S. Department of Commerce, promotes that new role for libraries by providing matching funds for nonprofit organizations and state and local governments to invest in telecommunications. The program targets "communities that might otherwise be bypassed by the information superhighway" (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1995). Complementing the grant program, the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Agriculture recently initiated a "Get Connected" campaign to urge rural residents and groups that are not likely to own computers (e.g., persons with low income or low educational attainment) to start learning how telecommunications and information technologies can benefit them (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1995). The campaign promotes establishing centers, possibly with TIIA matching grants, across the country to give people access to computers and training on how to use them. Although the TIIA grant program is small and "Get Connected" is a public education campaign, some rural libraries may become nodes on the information highway with help from these programs. In Drucker's (1994) view of the transformation of society:

the possibility of acquiring knowledge will no longer depend on obtaining a prescribed education at a given age. Learning will become the tool of the individual—available to him or her at any age—if only because so much skill and knowledge can be acquired by means of the new learning technologies. (p. 67)

Rural libraries linked to information networks are one of the "learning technologies" through which rural residents and businesses could continuously build their skill and knowledge bases and improve their competitive position in the coming century.

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Rural Information Needs and the Role of the Public Library

BERNARD VAVREK

ABSTRACT

THE PURPOSE OF THIS ARTICLE is to highlight some of the conditions affecting rural and small libraries in the United States and to describe their roles in providing information services. For many Americans, the community library continues to be viewed as a place for books and used primarily by women. This article also reviews the major findings of two research investigations conducted by the author under the sponsorship of the U. S. Department of Education.

INTRODUCTION

Whether it's the Grand Old Party, Windows (not the type one washes), or the Information Highway, metaphors have more than symbolic roles. In a time of intense societal reflection and use of the "r" words—i.e., reinvention, reorganization, etc.—looking for the proper metaphor to represent the rural public library has achieved a larger than life importance. This is particularly so in an information age where the institutional library is being swept away by the likes of Internet (Lewyn & Carey, 1994), online systems (Andrews, 1995), and a host of services that will be telephone-, cable-, or CD-ROM based (Markoff, 1995).

One suggestion that this author had as a new metaphor for the public library was "the information place." This idea was referred to some of my colleagues who judged it with polite neglect. My creative juices were excited, however, by comments in a new book entitled *Leadership and the Customer Revolution* (Heil et al., 1995). In one passage, the authors talked

about the role of information in an organization and stated, "information—and feedback in particular—is the true breakfast of champions" (p. 82). In many ways, one could argue convincingly that the public library in the United States fits this depiction. Have we not, for example, historically defined the public library as the "university of the people?"

Unfortunately, the typical public library is deficient in at least one component of achieving the "breakfast of champions" mantra—organizing feedback (from constituents). It has never been an institution where the solicited or unsolicited views of users has been important to its future. Oh, certainly, trustees, letters to the editor of the local newspaper, suggestion boxes, and surveys, have been utilized to transmit what the community thinks of its local library, but organized, systematic, and timely feedback has not been an important institutional goal. In a competitive society, no institution will survive unless it is able to actively evaluate its goals/objectives in the light of how well it provides needed services. It is surprising how long the community library has endured without those responsible paying much specific attention to their clients.

BACKGROUND

It was because of a concern for the lack of constituent feedback (on a national level) that the studies to be discussed in this article were undertaken. Both investigations were supported by grants received through the Public Library Program of the U. S. Department of Education under Title IIB of the Higher Education Act.

The need for these national investigations also resulted from the context that no studies of public library use have been conducted exclusively among nonmetropolitan audiences. Further, in modesty, no recent studies of public library use in the United States have taken on the dimensions of the research to be described in this article.

For example, D'Elia (1993) surveyed a little over 3,000 people, Estabrook's (1991) survey was limited to approximately 1,200 respondents, and Westin and Finger's (1991) survey was part of a general marketing survey compiled by Harris/Equifax with the data provided to the American Library Association rather than specifically being targeted as a study of library use.

In addition to the general opportunity of focusing on nonmetropolitan audiences, these investigations enabled the author to compare what may be described as the "library user" and "nonuser." While these concepts are obviously relative, the historical tendency of researchers, for a variety of reasons, has been to focus on library use. This is not surprising in that these data are the easiest to collect. Parenthetically, it should be noted that there is no greater challenge for all of public librarianship than to broaden the base of its constituencies. This can only be accomplished by a thorough review of the characteristics of those individuals who currently use the library and an equal understanding of

the needs of those folks who are not as yet "card carrying members of the library." Whether this rapprochement may be accomplished before the demise of the public library (as we know it) is a moot issue.

METHODOLOGY

The first study undertaken by the author at the Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship resulted in the document, *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek, 1990). This comprised a national survey conducted among 300 public libraries in 1989 in nonmetropolitan communities of no larger than 25,000 people. In addition to using the concept of "nonmetropolitan" for statistical comparisons, the U. S. Bureau of the Census' definition of "rural," being a place of under 2,500 people, was also utilized. Approximately $n = 3,500$ usable surveys were collected from adult respondents (at least seventeen years old) who answered a broad range of questions from "why they were visiting the library" to a "specific identification of their information needs and reliance on the library to answer those needs." A complete copy of the survey instrument may be examined as Appendix A of this article.

The second investigation yielded the publication entitled, *Assessing the Role of the Rural Public Library* (Vavrek, 1993). In retrospect, the author admits that the titles of these two research documents probably should have been reversed. In any event, in the spring and early summer of 1991, $n = 5,676$ adults at least seventeen years old were phoned within the continental United States. Individuals were asked, for example, "the frequency that they used the services of their local public library," "reasons for nonuse," "information needs," etc. A copy of the survey instrument is attached to this article as Appendix B. Library Science students within the Department of Library Science, Clarion University of Pennsylvania, conducted the telephone interviews. This approach worked exceedingly well, and the cost was a fraction of what would have been charged by commercial research companies. Parenthetically, this methodology of using students was utilized largely because of the encouragement of Daryl Heasley, director of the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development, who was a member of the research team.

Despite the growing number of answering machines, disconnected phones, and the general disinclination of individuals to respond to telephone inquiries, surveying efforts yielded a usable response rate of $n = 2,485$ (44 percent). Contributing to these highly satisfactory results—which exceeded the national average of 38 percent—was not only the excellent efforts displayed by the phone surveyors but also the positive effect of mailing introductory letters prior to the phone calls. While comparisons were not made to track a correlation between completed phone conversations and the availability of notification letters, clearly the letters helped. Timing was everything, however.

TRENDS

In an effort to provide a broader context to assist in the interpretation of the data generated in this article, the author will discuss the following trends of which the American public library is a part. These circumstances inexorably affect all public libraries in one degree or another.

Individualism

The public library, which developed as an agency of mass communication, must now cater to constituents who increasingly view themselves distinctly as individuals. In fact, one analyst refers to "individualism" as being the master trend of our time (Russell, 1993). Further, in relation to the ethnic backgrounds of these individuals, it is estimated that, in the near future, some states will be comprised mostly of minority populations. "Almost 25 percent of foreign-born Americans came to the United States between 1985 and 1990. Since 1960, the number of foreign-born residents has more than tripled from 1.5 million to 5.6 million" ("America's Colorful Heritage," 1993, p. 1). Small towns are also being affected by a "wave" of ethnic migration, but the circumstances are less pronounced. This diversity of constituencies is not only a problem in relation to the public library attempting to deliver services no longer to "mass audiences" but is compounded by the fact that the multiplication of specialty magazines, regionally oriented books, and special interest publications provide impossible challenges for public libraries to keep pace with information needs.

The Exodus to Rural Areas

In addition to client diversity, people are continuing to move away from metropolitan centers, where the public library movement began, in favor of the suburbs and unincorporated places that my friend Peirce Lewis refers to as "galactic cities." These latter are spread throughout the countryside, forming pockets of places where people live without a sense of corporate or personal community. While urban America now lives in the suburbs, the concepts of demography cannot always fully accommodate definitions of change. For example, as a part of suburban sprawl, "edge cities" are now a part of the new American frontier (Garreau, 1991). Likewise, in rural communities which become more and more difficult to discern from other places, Americans are moving further and further from the "downtown areas."

While public library systems have moved along with their clients via branch libraries as population centers have changed, and others have provided access in the form of dial-in telephone assistance, services to the homebound, etc., the concept of "going" to the library has been radically altered. Unfortunately, as communities of all sizes are perceived by their publics to be physically unsafe, citizens will continue to attempt to make their home as fortress-like as possible. Faith Popcorn (1991) and

others who talk about people "cocooning," attempt to encourage those responsible for all institutions to consider how traditional services will have to change to reach people where they live.

Convenience

While the business world understands the concepts of "convenience" and "saving time" for customers (thirty minute oil change, food delivered at home, ATMs, VCRs, pay-per-view television, etc.), the typical public library is only on the verge of using these principles in fashioning information services. It is this author's view that, as far as the public is concerned, the library is more a place than a service.

Public's Perception of the Library

The typical user continues to perceive the public library as a place of books. Consistently, public opinion research has reaffirmed the fact that bestsellers are more popular among library users than asking reference questions (Estabrook, 1991; Wittig, 1991; Vavrek, 1990a).

Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising, that, despite the continuum of resources available, the public library is not, as yet, at the top of the pecking order when the typical person is looking for information. The situation may be changing, however. When respondents were asked over the phone "If you wanted more information on the subject of protecting the environment...", about 22 percent indicated that they would "use the library." This response was only second to "ask a professional" (Vavrek, 1993). Unfortunately, when choices are reflected in the business world, the use of libraries as an information source finished thirteenth out of seventeenth in one recent investigation (Morrison Institute for Public Policy, 1990).

Resources of the Library

Despite the efforts of staff and the mix of resources available through the public library, only approximately half of the American public has either the time or the perceived need to use the library's services (Estabrook, 1991; Vavrek, 1993). While this latter comment may simply be another variation of whether the jar is half filled or half empty, the author is firmly convinced that one of the enduring problems is the public's continuing uncertainty of exactly what is available in the typical library. This situation can only be improved through daily public relations efforts. A justified concern, however, certainly has to be how much longer it will take to redress this long-playing problem. That is, a common refrain in "library land" has been that people simply do not know what is available in the library. A more important question relates to whose responsibility is it to fix this shortcoming?

Information Competition

Eventually librarians will be able to create an awareness among their clients about the services and resources available even in the smallest public institution. While this is happening, however, personal computers, data phones, cable television, electronic books, bulletin boards, and "900"

phone numbers—estimated now to be available through 300 newspapers (Piirto, 1993)—will make it increasingly difficult for the institutional library to compete. It is understood that not every American will be able to participate in this electronic Nirvana. In fact, “the mainstream online service user is forty years old, has a median household income of \$54,440, and is a college graduate. Of those who surf the Internet, the average age is thirty-four; men (75 percent) far outnumber women (25 percent)” (“Factoids,” 1995). But, as the information highway becomes more democratized, whether it is through the role of government or private enterprise, the public library as an institution is in jeopardy.

Library Funding

On matters of library funding, Holt (1992) has reminded us that, despite the efforts to be as diversified and responsive to human needs as possible, the dimensions of library economics and financial support are being eroded by the declining number of Americans who hold well-paying jobs, particularly professional, financial, and information-related ones. Further, to what extent will these individuals continue to want to support the public library? At the same time, public libraries cannot survive by only appealing to those who are least likely to be able to pay to support the library. While visions of the homeless person using the Internet to locate information is both compassionate and within the social role of the public library, can the library afford to provide this access?

Problems of Keeping Current

Directly related to the variety of complex problems waiting to be “fixed” is the tendency of public librarians to want to do everything. Attending programs of continuing education may be helpful to the intellect but they drive service-minded librarians to even greater heights of frustration by encouraging them to do more and more. While there is a great deal of discussion in the library community about marketing, it is badly understood in practice. Otherwise there would not be an accelerated effort to offer yet more and more diversified services particularly in the absence of client feedback—as noted earlier in this article. Marketers remind us that all institutions must carefully choose their major objectives in light of the fact that they operate within finite budgets.

While the above recitation of library issues is not complete, it is meant to suggest some of the forces pressing against the modern public library as it attempts to reinvent itself. Whether the library community can accommodate the challenges is a matter waiting for attention.

MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

At this point, the author would like to highlight some of the major issues that surfaced as a consequence of the surveys associated with producing *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek, 1990a) and *Assessing the Role of the Rural Public Library* (Vavrek, 1993).

THE FEMALE FACTOR

While it has now become a popular topic repeated by this author in a variety of different contexts, survey results strongly "verified" the fact that women are the predominant users of the rural and small libraries of America (Vavrek, 1990a; 1993). This was true in seven out of ten cases. Parenthetically, in a similar study of library use conducted among Pennsylvanians in 1990, the number of female users was a rather remarkable 80 percent (Vavrek, 1990b). While the subject of the female-dominated use of the public library is not a totally settled issue for some individuals—two of the author's favorite researchers attribute it to surveying bias (Willits & Willits, 1989)—supporting evidence of this "female phenomenon" may be observed from a history of public library user studies (Knight & Nourse, 1969; Doremus Porter Novelli, 1987; North Dakota Library Association..., 1990). The propensity for women to be clients of the rural and small public library is not surprising; however, the disparity with male users is. A recent survey of bookmobile use in rural America shows the same pattern (Vavrek, 1992).

When the author began publicly reporting how singularly important women are in supporting the library, some colleagues expressed reservations about the survey results. These individuals were less distracted about surveying bias than wondering about the extent to which women in small and rural towns were on errands for the rest of the family unit. Since this criticism had the potential to undercut what this author determined to be a major research finding, another survey was conducted to clarify the original findings. A total of $n = 1,950$ questionnaires was collected from $n = 157$ libraries (Vavrek, 1990a). In only 28 percent of the cases, however, did the female respondents indicate that they were acquiring things for others. Their primary use of the library was to borrow books for themselves.

Notwithstanding defining national norms of library users, those responsible for library services at the local level must clearly be able to profile their clients on a regular basis and not merely by casual observation.

Parenthetically, this is not only a problem in the library community. In a recent survey of mall use, business people expressed the concern that they did not really know when their customers preferred to shop ("At Shopping Centers, Emphasis on Shopping," 1995). While profiling library clients presents a special challenge in the rural and small library because of limited staffing, it is a critical factor to being able to offer timely and needed information services. Likewise, if the female user predominates at the local community library level, one must not only attempt to recognize this circumstance but use the "female factor" as a source of lobbying efforts. At the same time, it would be an egregious error to depict women in small town America in a totally "romantic" and inaccurate fashion (e.g., as being similar to the television Waltons). With the growing number of single mothers and the overall percentage of women

in the work force, it is not surprising that they feel the greatest amount of stress and have less time for relaxation when compared with working fathers and the unmarried (Godbey & Graefe, 1993). Unless those responsible for the management of public libraries focus on the present and future role of women as library users, they may discover this user base will erode in the future.

Future library success (and the ability to survive) must be viewed as more than a matter of courting women, however. Specific effort must be aimed directly at expanding the base of support through an augmentation in the number and diversity of active library clients. As suggested earlier in this document, the sociological composition of the United States is accelerating. This is also characteristic of rural America.

FREQUENCY OF LIBRARY USE

Trying to determine how frequently Americans use their public libraries appears to be no easy matter. For example, while Westin and Finger (1991) and Estabrook (1991) both employ the categories of "one to four times," "five to eleven times," and "twelve times or more during the past year" as their categories of library use, a variety of guideposts have been utilized by other researchers—including this author.

It is more than an academic matter that surveyors tabulate things in different arrays and those at the sideline cheer about disparate things. Westin and Finger (1991) have led those in leadership roles within the library community to boast about the fact that 66 percent of the American public uses their public library on an annual basis. While this apparently is an accurate statistic, it is based on the fact that 42 percent of those surveyed utilized their public library "twelve times or more" (with no further clarification) and 24 percent indicated a use of "five to eleven times during the past year." In the author's view, this really does not suggest the groundswell of populist support that some would wish. For example, by comparison, 69 percent of video watchers rent two or more movies a month ("Video Consumers would Rather Rent Movies...", 1993), 72 percent of the telephone households in the United States subscribe to cable television and have VCRs ("Electronic Media Users Use More," 1993), and "every day 77 percent of Americans aged twelve or older listens to the radio" (Piiro, 1994, p. 42). The author's intent is not to denigrate the survey results of other researchers but rather to suggest that the situation described earlier is symptomatic of the type of "competitive evidence" around which public librarianship is structured in the United States. Perhaps our difficulty, for example, in articulating the value of libraries to the public is that we do not really have a clue about the basic elements of comparison.

In *Assessing the Role of the Rural Public Library* (Vavrek, 1993), the optimist reading about the frequency of library use might postulate the fact that about 45 percent of the respondents are active users because of their

"daily" (2 percent), "weekly" (17 percent), and "monthly" (26 percent) habits. Other responses consisted of "annual" (24 percent), "fewer than annual" (16 percent), and "can't remember" (15 percent) usage patterns. This researcher's personal bias, as stated earlier, is that the monthly use of any institution does not place it in the popular and, therefore, important category. Wilkinson, for example, has talked about the importance of rural institutions, in particular, meeting community needs on a daily basis.

As a matter of comparison, the reader may be interested to know that in *Assessing the Information Needs of Rural Americans* (Vavrek, 1990a), 68 percent of those surveyed in the library indicated that they were weekly customers and 11 percent said that they used their public library on a daily basis.

OBSTACLES TO USE

As a means of determining some of the conditions that potentially prevent individuals from using their libraries on a more active basis, a set of questions was asked of the telephone respondents in *Assessing the Role of the Rural Public Library* (Vavrek, 1993). Options such as "lack of transportation," "hours are inconvenient," "library is too far away," etc., were among the alternative choices that those surveyed were offered. Fifty-five percent of the respondents indicated that the "lack of time" was either a definite "yes" or "somewhat a problem," and 38 percent of those surveyed indicated that "I have no need [to use the library]."

While perhaps it is not surprising that individuals perceive a lack of time to be a major obstacle to library use, since Americans view their situations as consisting of less time outside of work to pursue leisure activities (Godbey & Graefe, 1993), it is distressing that so many people responding indicated that they had no need to use the library. Estabrook (1991) also found that "a lack of time" and "no need" to be the top reasons for a lack of more aggressive library use.

Library science students who conducted the telephone interviews were upset with respondents who told them that they did not have any need for the library. After all, it is more than just a little deflating to be assured of the importance and significance of libraries in society through class discussions, examination of the professional literature, and so on, and then to be baptized into the real world of cynicism. Aside from the practical lesson, all of public librarianship needs to hear the same message: "I have no need." The reason for this, of course, is not to achieve some cruel thrill but rather to ensure the fact that those responsible are aware of the reasons for citizens' nonuse and to determine a course correction.

It is the author's impression that "no need" may really be a circumstance of those surveyed not being familiar enough with library services to be able to determine what is available to satisfy individual situations.

Supporting the author's assumption are the results of the following questions, which were asked of the telephone respondents: "Other than books, magazines, and newspapers, are you familiar with other materials or services that your public library has?" To this, 53 percent of those responding indicated "no." Although a respectable percentage of the respondents were aware of other things available at the library, a majority were not. Not surprisingly, through a cross tabulation of the data, library users are shown to respond more positively to this question than nonusers. That is, users are inclined to be more familiar with library services—i.e., other than newspapers, etc.—than nonusers (anyone who used the library less frequently than "monthly" was considered a nonuser).

"No need" may also be interpreted from the results of another question asked of those polled by phone. "When was the last time you saw or heard any type of advertising about your public library or its services?" Only 36 percent of the respondents (who represent "daily," "weekly," and "monthly" users) reported hearing or seeing any communication (advertising) from the public library within the last year. A cross tabulation of these data, not surprisingly, shows that users more frequently than nonusers reported an awareness of library public relations efforts.

Specialists remind us, of course, that channels of communication are used selectively. That is, we tend to hear and read those things which are consistent with our own beliefs and vice versa. The implication, therefore, is that those who are primed to use the library and its services are tuned in and interested in what is going on. The reverse is true as well.

The earlier commentary would seem to suggest that an active public relations campaign, if not a marketing effort, is very much needed in rural and small public libraries around the United States. At the same time, it should be understood that, not only because of a limitation of staffing but because of the variety of resources available at the smallest library, the process of advertising is not as simple as it would otherwise seem. Library customers, no more so than those utilizing the services of other institutions, are not concerned about the abstraction of the public library—for example, as a societal institution—but rather are confronted with the practical reality of finding answers to practical questions/problems or to satisfy other immediate informational needs. The focus of library advertising (the term "marketing" is preferred) is to ensure the fact that it is constant and that as many avenues of the marketing mix are used as possible—local radio announcements, press releases, cable television promotions, printed brochures, posters, handouts at the grocery store, presentations at service organizations and at other civic groups, etc. Challenging the speedy adoption of marketing efforts is both the insufficient availability of staff members (or volunteers) and an absence of how-to-do-it techniques.

INFORMATION NEEDS

As with most things in life, attempting to identify the information needs of Americans living in nonmetropolitan areas of the United States proved a considerable challenge. Along the way, professional self-doubt

"reared its ugly head" with concerns such as, do individuals really think about the information they need in any systematic fashion? The research reported in this document does not answer that question. It is the author's impression, however that, while the typical American would have difficulty functioning without access to the answers to things—"When does the post office open?" "What time does the mall close?" "What's on TV tonight?"—one is really not conditioned to think of "information" either in a conceptual fashion or as a product. Added to this uncertainty was also the matter of being able to determine the degree to which the public library could provide services.

By comparing Appendixes A and B of this document, the reader will note that, in both surveys, library users and telephone respondents were asked to identify their daily information needs and the extent to which the library provided information on those topics. Because of the different format in the two surveys, the investigation conducted in the library (Appendix A) used a scale which was determined to be too involved to use in the telephone survey. Phone respondents were asked to answer with "yes," "no," or "somewhat" to the question of whether or not they used the library for gathering information on certain topics.

The two surveys resulted in different things being identified by those participating as top choices, but the margins of difference were slight. For example, Appendix A illustrates that those surveyed in the library were interested in "bestsellers" as their number one choice followed by "national news" and "local news." Phone respondents (Appendix B) indicated greatest enthusiasm for "national news," "local news," and "decisions of local governments," respectively. "Bestsellers" as a choice for phone respondents was low in the pecking order of importance. This difference between the two surveys may be partially explained by the fact that it was determined that library users read seven books a month, and the phone respondents (representing a more generic audience, the non-user) read only three books a month.

Survey participants identified other categories as important daily information needs, however, in addition to those things mentioned earlier. They include "social services," "programs of education," "health/medical services," etc. On these informational matters of a more timely framework (as opposed to bestsellers and reference books), the library was not utilized as frequently as it should be in providing services. To cite two illustrative examples from the phone survey, first (the reader will be able to make additional comparisons by consulting the Appendixes), 48 percent of the respondents indicated that information on "health/medical services" was important to them, but in only 25 percent of the instances did the library ever provide information to them on those related

topics; second, 31 percent of those surveyed identified "local social services" as a daily information need. However, in only 12 percent of the circumstances was the library utilized. The same disparities may also be visualized by referring to Appendix A, which highlights the survey of library users.

In respect to the above discussion, librarians in rural and small public libraries must attempt to recognize the differences between the informational needs of their customers and the extent to which these same individuals rely on the library to satisfy those needs. The examples of information needs discussed earlier require library staff to acquire or access data that are out of the book trade in ease of collecting. It means contacting and going to community agencies, local government, health services, etc., to acquire current information and to organize these things in formats that the public will find practical to utilize. It is hoped that the growth of electronic community networks, free nets, etc., will provide a facility that enables differences between information needs and information services to be mitigated. Actions, regardless to the extent to which they are dynamic, will again fall short of target markets if there is not a commensurate effort at advertising.

WISH LIST

Phone respondents were asked, "If the public library could provide the following services [computerized information, books-on-tape, literacy services, day care services, activities for senior citizens, job training], would you be interested?" To this, 54 percent of the respondents answered either "yes" or "somewhat" to the category of "computerized information." The next highest positive response rate (39 percent) was for "job training." Additional answers may be found in Appendix B.

While the above question and subsequent responses were offered with the sense of attempting to gauge emerging services, individuals could luxuriate in their choices as a "wish list." Since there was no penalty for choosing all of the above options, one might have anticipated that respondents would have said "yes" to everything. That clearly was not the case, however. Should it be surprising that slightly over half of those surveyed by telephone indicated that they would use computerized services at their library if these were available? Probably not—aren't we all rolling down the information highway?

Depending on the resources that one uses, the family "truckster" (online services used at home) accounts for anywhere from 20 percent to 30 percent of the vehicles on the I-bahn. Present concerns, of course, not only relate to the manner in which NREN, the National Research and Education Network (the Internet), will progress, but the manner in which the typical American (who presently is without a computer and technical experience) will be able to participate in the glories of "gophering." Providing services to the have-nots of America has always

been an enthusiastic mission for librarians. It is not surprising, then, that the information society has provided a new vigor for an old pursuit. The problem is, however, that the typical rural library does not necessarily have the equipment appropriate for info-surfing, and the cumulative effect of what we presently consider to be the information highway is a totally new experience. One, for example, should not necessarily assume that future information access will be made through the institutional library rather than directly by consumers. It will only be through the immediate action of the library community that its integral role will be ensured.

ACCOMMODATING THE FUTURE

It is hoped that the world of assessing rural information needs was helped by the studies reported in this article. Needed now is an encouragement to individuals at the local level to begin their analysis of constituent service requirements. In the absence of a national library movement, one is reminded that "all politics are local." Hindering the local assessment of data is an immense problem—the typical librarian in a rural or small community may lack the technical knowledge of how to collect the information that is particularly important. While visions of other things (all electronic) distract library leaders, much of the necessary infrastructure for the future success of rural and small public libraries is not, as yet, in place. "How to develop goals and objectives," "techniques of evaluation," and "needs assessment" are among the priorities waiting for concentrated attention. If only the library community could commit itself to specific things once in a while, instead of attempting to do everything. Priority attention must be given by state library agencies, library districts, consortia, etc., to those matters which are basic to the effective functioning of the library. Taming the Internet will wait in favor of more immediate targets.

While it will come as no surprise to the reader, public library leadership and services around the United States vary considerably. In those rural and small towns that are not fortunate enough to be part of some larger library system, or in states where there is inadequate growth potential, it must be clear to those who are responsible for public library services that they are on their own. And if ever the spirit of "we can do it" needs to surface, it is now. Stripped of their "glamour," small communities are faced with a regiment of problems—waste disposal, health services, and coping with a world economy—to name a few. It will only be through the action of community leaders that the community itself, and its community information center (the library) will survive.

As a continuation of the discussion above, library staff in rural and small libraries must understand their responsibilities in promoting community development. In many places throughout the United States, the

local library is seen as a heroic but stereotypical institution—a place for books, children, and women. While promoting literacy among all constituent groups is an admirable goal, there will be no future library unless all segments of the body politic contribute to the cultural and economic development of the community. The American public library must not only be perceived as an active element of promoting community growth, it must function as such.

In many places, rural and small libraries have benefitted enormously from the application of technology. Just a few years ago, for example, discussing the implementation of automated services in a small library was almost a financial impossibility. Now, one has a choice of vendors. Likewise, insightful library network administrators throughout the United States have enabled the smallest institution to be brought into the electronic big leagues. At the same time, while it is an inescapable construct of competition with other community agencies—as well as good sense—it must be clear that the library cannot win the technology game. Its fiscal pockets are not deep enough. Perhaps it sounds foolish to offer admonishment and congratulations at the same time. But at the community level, there should be particular care taken that the local library is not transformed into an electronic shell game. The community library must continue to be a meeting place for people, a source for relevant programming, as well as a clearinghouse for providing timely access to information. Although it may strike the reader as a naïve comment, the application of technology should not distract those responsible for the management of the public library from more important issues.

While it is difficult to escape the significance of financial support as a major hedge against library development, the correlative issues of education and training are equally extenuating. For the nonmetropolitan areas used in this document (that is, populations up to 25,000), only 21 percent of the librarians in those places have completed their first professional library degree. In populations of fewer than 2,500 people, only 4 percent of the librarians have academic training (Chute, 1993, p. 30). It is the author's view that unless the schools of library and information science begin to assert a stronger leadership role in providing for the educational and training needs of librarians and those seeking to become librarians—particularly in geographically remote areas—large libraries and library systems will begin training and educating their own staff members. There are already examples of this occurring. Further, the most significant impediment to the application of new technology is the inability of practitioners to stay current and utilize what already is available. While this latter problem is endemic to an information society, acknowledging it is not the same as being able to develop strategies to overcome it. Librarians and support staff in small and rural libraries are particularly vulnerable owing to the lack of training mentors and ready access to

technicians. A case in point that came to this author's attention was an organization that was attempting to deliver a teleconferenced program to a variety of downlink sites but failed because the local librarians were unaware of how to go about adjusting the receivers to a new frequency. Equally poignant examples exist when library staffers attend Internet workshops, for example, but have neither the equipment nor time to practice their new skills.

CONCLUSION

As a way of ending, the author would offer the following quotation:

By no means are paper or books or libraries going to disappear completely. But their traditional presence and significance in our culture, and the degree to which they've informed our concepts of self, identity, and consciousness, seem poised to fade as seemingly cheaper, less polluting, more flexible, and more attention-grabbing digital media come to the fore. (Verity, 1994, p. 12)

The concept of library has been radically changed in a short time. Clearly, the Internet is an example of the new librarianship. Despite the accomplishments and challenges of technology, however, the rural librarian has a more immediate concern—survival of the community. It is critical that this basic concept be understood and action taken.

APPENDIX A

ASSESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF RURAL AMERICANS

Q.1 On a day-to-day basis, how important is it to you to have information on the following topics?

	<i>Frequency</i>					
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6*</i>
Hobby/crafts	680	533	870	619	581	248
Local business/investment	943	716	749	433	344	346
Action of govt officials	612	570	812	583	617	337
How to do it/reference	381	422	761	837	821	309
Legal matters	992	706	796	421	293	323
Local history/genealogy	645	602	777	590	652	265
Local news	349	351	628	775	1,172	256
National news	304	293	662	778	1,236	258
Health/medical services	335	407	787	858	865	279
Current decisions of local government	475	466	771	709	824	286
Matters of self-improvement	334	368	893	863	803	270
Getting or changing jobs	1,197	502	678	441	366	347
Local community events	374	429	880	841	732	275
Programs of education	348	322	729	819	1,020	293
Local social services	735	566	897	595	447	291
Best sellers	391	361	603	602	1,377	197
Local ordinances/laws	583	577	889	653	507	322
Videocassettes	890	469	696	549	581	346
Computers	1,075	495	635	475	458	391
Others	162	26	43	61	275	2,964

*1=least important

Q.2 What do you think should be the most important goal of this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Sponsor programs	53	1.6
b. To provide information	2,069	61.6
c. Services for children	321	9.6
d. To provide a quiet place	78	2.3
e. Leisure materials (books, mag.)	816	24.3
f. Leisure materials (tapes, etc.)	24	0.7
No response	170	

Q.3 How often do you come to this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Daily	375	10.9
b. Weekly	2,357	68.4
c. Monthly	569	16.5
d. Rarely	118	3.4
e. First time today	27	0.8
No response	85	

Q.4 What was the major reason for coming to the library today?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Children's services/materials	321	9.4
b. Magazines	122	3.6
c. Newspapers	136	4.0
d. Return materials	322	9.4
e. Information/reference	518	15.1
f. Leisure materials—print—books	1,278	37.3
g. Leisure materials—nonprint	87	2.5
h. School assignment	172	5.0
i. Photocopying	47	1.4
j. Browsing	22	0.6
k. Tutoring/instructional services	22	0.6
l. Heating/air conditioning		
m. Place to relax	44	1.3
n. Place to hold meeting	47	1.4
o. Other	287	8.4
No response or miscode	106	

Q.5 Did this library provide what you needed today?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	3,166	91.4
b. No	43	1.2
c. To some degree	254	7.3
Blank or miscode	68	

Q.6 Was your reason for coming to the library today typical of why you usually come to the library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	2,656	77.0
b. No	290	8.4
c. To some degree	501	14.5
No response or miscode	83	

Q.7 If you answered "no" or "to some degree," what was different about your reason for coming to this library today?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Lack of time for typical usage	24	2.7
b. Change in materials selected	412	47.1
c. Meeting	22	2.5
d. Study	30	3.4
e. Other	287	32.8
Missing or miscode	2,756	

Most people were routed around this item.

Q.8 Would you be willing to pay a fee for the library services that you received today?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	1,497	43.7
b. No	815	23.8
c. To some degree	1,114	32.5
No response or miscode	105	

Q.9 If you had to pay a fee for the services that you received today, how much would you be willing to pay?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Less than \$1.00	1,527	48.9
b. \$1.00-\$1.99	978	31.3
c. \$2.00-\$2.99	315	10.1
d. \$3.00-\$3.99	81	2.6
e. More than \$4.00	233	7.1
No response or miscode	406	

Q.10 How important is this library to you in providing information on:

	<i>Frequency</i>					
	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6*</i>
Matters of self improvement	523	425	836	735	664	348
Local business/investment	1,038	708	757	364	232	432
Local social services	946	668	798	399	267	453
Best-sellers	346	275	478	598	1,545	289
Action of government officials	814	547	823	517	405	425
Hobby/crafts	565	398	742	737	765	324
Videocassettes	1,147	443	568	434	500	439
Local history/genealogy	600	541	779	602	634	375
Getting or changing jobs	1,287	544	638	358	260	444
Reference books	201	158	539	768	1,568	297
Computers	1,371	421	527	370	391	451
How to do it/reference	421	337	699	736	934	404
Local ordinances/laws	846	631	811	460	314	469
Legal matters	973	688	770	403	245	452
Local news	767	455	704	562	657	386
National news	715	450	697	575	713	381
Programs of education	540	377	760	697	758	399
Health/medical services	629	472	844	637	549	400
Current decision of local government	773	616	758	492	417	475
Other	188	31	59	49	229	2,975

*1 = least important

Q.11 Do you feel you have information needs which cannot be met at this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	524	15.5
b. No	2,400	71.1
c. To some degree	446	13.2
No response or miscode	161	

Q.12 If you answered "yes" or "to some degree," list up to three of these unmet information needs.

	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	
More specific reference books	205	53	21	279
Religious materials	23	14	4	41
Medical/health	25	8	9	42
Self-help/self-instruction	33	36	11	80
Science/technology	50	23	8	81
Genealogy	37	9	4	50
National newspapers	18	10	7	35
Better periodicals/more periodicals	42	40	14	96
Current politics/current events	21	3	3	27
History	31	15	7	53
Best-sellers	17	19	6	42
Science fiction	5	6		11
Career information	12	4	3	19
Online systems	11	8	3	21
Other	329	168	81	578
No response	2,672	3,112	3,347	

Four people listed four needs. They would add one to the counts for "periodicals" and "online systems" and two to "other."

Q.13 How quickly are you able to obtain the materials that you need at this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. That day	1,959	59.9
b. Within a week	886	27.1
c. Within 2 weeks	371	11.3
d. Longer than 2 weeks	47	1.4
No response	268	

Q.14 If you wanted to change one thing about this library, what would it be?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Larger building	456	22.1
Larger selection of materials	287	13.9
More current materials	98	4.7
Open more hours	280	13.6
Open fewer hours	2	0.1
Quiet area needed	79	3.8
More science fiction	6	0.3
More newspapers	8	0.4
Have meeting rooms	6	0.3
More microfilm readers	8	0.4
More non-fiction	19	0.9
Expand reference collection	55	2.7
Video availability	41	2.0
More recorded music	12	0.6
Have computers	37	1.8
Make it easier to find materials	13	0.6
Handicapped access to all levels	5	0.2
Better floor plan	20	1.0
Large print materials	2	0.1
Other	558	27.0
No response	1,536	

Q.15 How important is this library to the well-being of your community?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Not important	5	0.1
b. Somewhat important	85	2.4
c. Important	601	17.3
d. Highly important	1,671	48.0
e. Critically important	1,117	32.1
No response or miscode	52	

Q.16 In overall services, rate this library.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Poor	5	0.1
b. Fair	113	3.3
c. Good	1,257	36.2
d. Excellent	2,094	60.4
No response or miscode	62	

Q.17 In addition to the library, where else do you regularly get information to answer your questions?

	<i>Frequency</i>			
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	<i>Total</i>
a. Newspapers	653	371	137	1,161
b. Word of mouth	199	206	209	614
c. Professionals	96	88	61	245
d. Own books, magazines, etc.	562	470	284	1,316
e. T.V.	267	322	186	775
f. Other libraries	481	223	106	810
g. Gov't agencies non-profit org.	238	146	76	460
h. Bookstores	104	85	45	234
i. Seminars/workshops	4	8	13	25
j. Other	111	134	143	388
No response or miscode	816	1,478	2,271	

Q.17 total includes responses from respondents who provided more than three information sources.

Q.18 Over the last six months, how many books have you read?

Number of respondents = 3293
 Mean = 41.5
 SD = 73.5
 Min = 0
 Max = 999

Q.19 Do you read any magazines on a regular basis?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	2,753	81.9
b. No	608	18.1
No response or miscode	170	

Q.20 If "yes," which do you regularly read?

	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	
a. Family life	716	643	508	1,867
b. News	596	404	281	1,281
c. Lifestyles	560	572	444	1,576
d. Nature	223	240	220	683
e. Consumer	27	39	33	99
f. Religion	87	70	62	219
g. Financial	78	72	52	202
h. Computers	26	23	23	72
i. Hobbies	300	314	328	942
j. Professional journals	95	93	72	260
k. Assn. Soc. J.	14	21	18	53
l. Other	68	70	66	204
No response	741	970		1,424

Q. 21 Do you belong to any community or social organizations?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Yes	1,600	48.9
b. No	1,665	50.9
No response or miscode	266	

Q.22 If you answered "yes," please list the organizations to which you belong.

	<i>Frequency</i>			<i>Total</i>
	<i>1st</i>	<i>2nd</i>	<i>3rd</i>	
a. Elected/app. local gov't	40	15	15	70
b. Church	320	151	76	547
c. Civic group—multipurpose	227	78	56	361
d. Special interest—single purpose	799	570	306	1,675
e. Youth/children	90	67	38	195
f. Lodges/fraternities	81	79	33	193
g. Other	57	51	19	127
No response	1,917	2,520	2,988	

Q.23 Annually, how much would you estimate that your community spends per person to support this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. < \$1.00	459	16.2
b. \$1.00-\$1.99	456	16.1
c. \$2.00-\$2.99	573	20.2
d. \$3.00-\$3.99	351	12.4
e. More than \$4.00	978	34.5
No response or miscode	714	

Q.24 Annually, what would you consider to be the ideal level of community support per person for this library?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. < \$1.00	88	3.1
b. \$1.00-\$1.99	213	7.5

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c. \$2.00-\$2.99	393	13.8
d. \$3.00-\$3.99	438	15.4
e. More than \$4.00	1,699	59.7
No response or miscode	700	

Q.25 My occupation is:

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Professional	713	21.1
b. Technical & skilled labor	299	8.9
c. Clerical	217	6.4
d. Service worker	102	3.0
e. Student	316	9.4
f. Homemaker	852	25.2
g. Retired	669	19.8
h. Laborer	92	2.7
i. Other	118	3.5
No response or miscode	153	

Q.26 My age is:

N = 3377
Mean = 44.7
SD = 17.1
Min = 0
Max = 87

Q.27 My gender is:

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Female	2,526	72.8
b. Male	943	27.2
No response or miscode	62	

Q.28 My highest level of schooling is:

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
a. 1-6 grade school	30	0.9
b. 7-8 jr. high	70	2.0
c. 9-11 high school	188	5.5
d. 12 high school grad/G.E.D.	1,229	36.0
e. Tech./trade/business school/A.A.	459	13.4
f. B.A./B.S.	885	25.9
g. Master's	343	10.0
h. Doctorate, M.D., D.V.M., D.D.S.	40	1.2
i. Other	170	5.0
No response	117	

APPENDIX B

ASSESSING THE ROLE OF THE RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY

The following data represent the preliminary results of a national telephone survey conducted among $n = 5,676$ adults residing in nonmetropolitan areas in the United States during the period of February-June, 1991. The usable response rate was $n = 2,485$ (44%). This research was supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Public Library Programs.

Q1. Please indicate your age, at your nearest birthday, according to the following categories:

- Female: 1,653 respondents, 66.3%
- Male: 832 respondents, 33.4%
- a. 17-26, 315 respondents, 12.6%
- b. 27-36, 529 respondents, 21.2%
- c. 37-46, 549 respondents, 22.0%
- d. 47-56, 314 respondents, 12.6%
- e. Over 56, 781 respondents, 31.3%

Q2. How often do you use your public library or its services?

- a. *daily*, 46 respondents, 1.8%
- b. *weekly*, 387 respondents, 15.5%
- c. *monthly*, 582 respondents, 23.3%
- d. *once a year*, 38 respondents, 21.6%
- e. *less than once a year*, 372 respondents, 14.9%
- f. *don't know/can't remember*, 353 respondents, 14.2%

Q3. We realize that there are lots of reasons that people don't use their public library more often. Are the following concerns to you?

- a. *library is too far away*
 - Yes: 357 respondents, 14.3%
 - No: 2,059 respondents, 82.6%
 - Somewhat: 69 respondents, 2.8%
- b. *no transportation*
 - Yes: 148 respondents, 5.9%
 - No: 2,301 respondents, 92.3%
 - Somewhat: 33 respondents, 1.3%
- c. *hours are inconvenient*
 - Yes: 467 respondents, 18.7%
 - No: 1,796 respondents, 72.0%
 - Somewhat: 213 respondents, 8.5%
- d. *it doesn't have what I want*
 - Yes: 321 respondents, 12.9%
 - No: 1,930 respondents, 77.4%
 - Somewhat: 220 respondents, 8.8%
- e. *I have no need*
 - Yes: 755 respondents, 30.3%
 - No: 1,530 respondents, 61.4%
 - Somewhat: 198 respondents, 7.9%
- f. *not sure of what's there*
 - Yes: 386 respondents, 15.5%
 - No: 1,938 respondents, 77.7%
 - Somewhat: 153 respondents, 6.1%

- g. *staff is unpleasant*
 Yes: 64 respondents, 2.6%
 No: 2,367 respondents, 94.9%
 Somewhat: 37 respondents, 1.5%
- h. *not enough time*
 Yes: 1,181 respondents, 47.4%
 No: 1,121 respondents, 45.0%
 Somewhat: 170 respondents, 6.8%
- i. *I need to brush-up on my reading*
 Yes: 506 respondents, 20.3%
 No: 1,882 respondents, 75.5%
 Somewhat: 69 respondents, 2.8%
- j. *I am physically unable*
 Yes: 104 respondents, 4.2%
 No: 2,346 respondents, 94.1%
 Somewhat: 20 respondents, .8%
- k. *I use other libraries*
 Yes: 557 respondents, 22.3%
 No: 1,834 respondents, 73.6%
 Somewhat: 75 respondents, 3.0%

Q4. If your public library could provide the following services, would you be interested in them?

- a. *computerized information*
 Yes: 1,189 respondents, 47.7%
 No: 962 respondents, 38.6%
 Somewhat: 174 respondents, 7.0%
 Available Now: 145 respondents, 5.8%
- b. *books-on-tape*
 Yes: 921 respondents, 36.9%
 No: 1,307 respondents, 52.4%
 Somewhat: 118 respondents, 4.7%
 Available Now: 125 respondents, 5.0%
- c. *literacy services*
 Yes: 569 respondents, 22.8%
 No: 1,684 respondents, 67.5%
 Somewhat: 123 respondents, 4.9%
 Available Now: 92 respondents, 3.7%
- d. *day care services*
 Yes: 448 respondents, 18.0%
 No: 1,896 respondents, 76.1%
 Somewhat: 99 respondents, 4.0%
 Available Now: 24 respondents, 1.0%
- e. *activities/senior citizens*
 Yes: 813 respondents, 32.6%
 No: 1,444 respondents, 57.9%
 Somewhat: 149 respondents, 6.0%
 Available Now: 61 respondents, 2.4%
- f. *job training*
 Yes: 975 respondents, 39.1%
 No: 1,349 respondents, 54.1%
 Somewhat: 122 respondents, 4.9%
 Available Now: 19 respondents, .8%

Q5. When was the last time you saw or heard any type of advertising about your public library or its services?

- a. *last week (includes daily)* 547 respondents, 21.9%
- b. *last month* 341 respondents, 13.7%
- c. *within last year* 309 respondents, 12.4%
- d. *no response/can't remember* 1,113 respondents, 44.6%

These next questions concern your need for information on a daily basis.

Q6. On a day-to-day basis, do you need information on the following topics?

- a. *hobbies/crafts*
Yes: 730 respondents, 29.3%
No: 1,523 respondents, 61.1%
Somewhat: 212 respondents, 8.5%
- b. *local news*
Yes: 1,787 respondents, 71.7%
No: 601 respondents, 24.1%
Somewhat: 76 respondents, 3.0%
- c. *programs of education*
Yes: 1,216 respondents, 48.8%
No: 1,049 respondents, 42.1%
Somewhat: 202 respondents, 8.1%
- d. *best-selling books*
Yes: 905 respondents, 36.3%
No: 1,355 respondents, 53.5%
Somewhat: 224 respondents, 9.0%
- e. *national news*
Yes: 1,794 respondents, 72.0%
No: 583 respondents, 23.4%
Somewhat: 88 respondents, 3.5%
- f. *decisions of local government*
Yes: 1,490 respondents, 59.8%
No: 811 respondents, 32.5%
Somewhat: 163 respondents, 6.5%
- g. *reference or how-to-book*
Yes: 1,189 respondents, 47.7%
No: 1,001 respondents, 40.2%
Somewhat: 274 respondents, 11.0%
- h. *health/medical services*
Yes: 1,186 respondents, 47.6%
No: 1,053 respondents, 42.2%
Somewhat: 223 respondents, 8.9%
- i. *local social services*
Yes: 769 respondents, 30.8%
No: 1,528 respondents, 61.3%
Somewhat: 164 respondents, 6.6%
- j. *videocassettes*
Yes: 981 respondents, 39.4%
No: 1,276 respondents, 51.2%
Somewhat: 204 respondents, 8.2%

Q7. If you wanted more information on the subject of managing money, which of the following would you do? Please give your first and second choices.

- a. *ask a friend or relative*
first choice: 552 respondents, 22.1%
second choice: 317 respondents, 12.7%
- b. *ask a professional*
first choice: 1,014 respondents, 40.7%
second choice: 466 respondents, 18.7%
- c. *buy a book or magazine*
first choice: 227 respondents, 9.1%
second choice: 470 respondents, 18.9%
- d. *attend a lecture*
first choice: 86 respondents, 3.4%
second choice: 189 respondents, 7.6%
- e. *use the public library*
first choice: 274 respondents, 11.0%
second choice: 407 respondents, 16.3%
- f. *take a class*
first choice: 203 respondents, 8.1%
second choice: 339 respondents, 13.6%
- g. *other: Specify*
first choice: 35 respondents, 1.4%
second choice: 14 respondents, 0.6%

Q8. If you wanted more information on the subject of protecting the environment, which of the following would you do? Please give your first and second choices.

- a. *ask a friend or relative*
first choice: 184 respondents, 7.4%
second choice: 167 respondents, 6.7%
- b. *ask a professional*
first choice: 670 respondents, 26.9%
second choice: 363 respondents, 14.6%
- c. *buy a book or magazine*
first choice: 397 respondents, 15.9%
second choice: 466 respondents, 18.7%
- d. *attend a lecture*
first choice: 333 respondents, 13.4%
second choice: 378 respondents, 15.2%
- e. *use the public library*
first choice: 547 respondents, 21.9%
second choice: 553 respondents, 22.2%
- f. *take a class*
first choice: 194 respondents, 7.8%
second choice: 257 respondents, 10.3%
- g. *other: Specify*
first choice: 25 respondents, 1.0%
second choice: 12 respondents, 0.5%

These last questions concern your use of information in the library.

Q9. Does the public library ever provide information to you personally on the following topics?

- a. *local social services*

- Yes: 301 respondents, 12.1%
 No: 2,023 respondents, 81.1%
 Somewhat: 98 respondents, 3.9%
- b. *videocassettes*
 Yes: 625 respondents, 25.1%
 No: 1,731 respondents, 69.4%
 Somewhat: 68 respondents, 2.7%
- c. *reference or how-to books*
 Yes: 1,201 respondents, 48.2%
 No: 1,114 respondents, 44.7%
 Somewhat: 113 respondents, 4.5%
- d. *local news*
 Yes: 636 respondents, 25.5%
 No: 1,698 respondents, 68.1%
 Somewhat: 93 respondents, 3.7%
- e. *programs of education*
 Yes: 748 respondents, 30.0%
 No: 1,564 respondents, 62.7%
 Somewhat: 112 respondents, 4.5%
- f. *best-selling books*
 Yes: 1,011 respondents, 40.6%
 No: 1,312 respondents, 52.6%
 Somewhat: 100 respondents, 4.0%
- g. *hobby/crafts*
 Yes: 946 respondents, 37.9%
 No: 1,358 respondents, 54.5%
 Somewhat: 125 respondents, 5.0%
- h. *health/medical services*
 Yes: 630 respondents, 25.3%
 No: 1,647 respondents, 66.1%
 Somewhat: 143 respondents, 5.7%
- i. *decisions of local government*
 Yes: 499 respondents, 20.0%
 No: 1,809 respondents, 72.6%
 Somewhat: 112 respondents, 4.5%
- j. *national news*
 Yes: 669 respondents, 26.8%
 No: 1,662 respondents, 66.7%
 Somewhat: 96 respondents, 3.9%

Q10. Other than books, magazines, and newspapers, are you familiar with other materials or services that your public library has?

Yes: 1,110 respondents, 44.5%
 No: 1,332 respondents, 53.4%

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The Funding of Rural Libraries

MARK MERRIFIELD

ABSTRACT

FUNDING FOR RURAL LIBRARIES comes from a variety of sources. For the purposes of this article, two funding sources will be discussed: federal and state. Local funding issues are as diverse as the communities in which libraries are located. In the case of rural libraries, all funding sources are critical to their survival. However, the notion of federal and state roles and responsibilities to assist rural libraries is the basis of this article.

THE FEDERAL ROLE—HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

One can argue that the federal role in aiding public libraries began in 1802, the year the Library of Congress was created and, as Molz (1990) says, became the "de facto national library of the United States" (p. 2). Although the Library of Congress' role in providing cataloging information (1901), free matter for the blind and physically handicapped (1931), and MARC data (1969), is of long standing, other federal programs have provided financial and other support to America's libraries in the last 140 years. The Depository Library program began in 1857. Every member of the House or Senate could designate a library in their area to receive publications for free use by the public. Depository libraries are located in all U.S. states and territories. Other examples of federal involvement with libraries include the much-discussed postal subsidies for free mail for the blind and fourth class (library) rates.

The American Library Association (ALA), representing America's libraries and librarians, argued in the past that increases in postal rates, and especially the termination of postal subsidies, would severely limit the public library role in the "mitigation of isolation for many rural readers and for those who are homebound" (Molz, 1990, p. 7). Federal support programs for libraries continue to be argued over by those who wish to see them eliminated, as well as by the library community which sees these funds as vital elements that are needed to extend library services to underserved segments of the population.

THE LIBRARY SERVICES ACT

The first federal public library grant-in-aid program was the Library Services Act (LSA) signed into law by President Dwight Eisenhower on June 19, 1956. The signing of this act was the culmination of ten years of work by the American Library Association and library supporters across the country. In each of the twelve preceding years, bills were presented in Congress; in 1944, 1946, and 1950 bills supporting federal funding for rural libraries passed the Senate. The 1950 Senate bill reached the House but was defeated by a vote of 164 to 161. It would take five years for supporters to get legislation moving again.

The Declaration of Policy in the Library Services Act states that the purpose of the act is "to promote the further extension by the several states of public library services to *rural areas* [author's emphasis] without such services or with inadequate services" (Gardner, 1971, p. 196). In the early 1940s, Southern states took the lead in passing state laws that supported libraries. There were few libraries in these states, and those that existed were primarily county libraries in rural areas. State aid helped these rural libraries to grow, and the development of state plans for increasing library services was well underway by the time LSA was passed (School of Library Science, University of North Carolina, 1982). Passage of the act had in fact hinged on the issue of states rights. During the hearings held in 1956, Congress asked the ALA representative if the LSA would have any impact on segregation. The representative replied that there were no racial questions in the bill. States rights were clearly written into the bill which satisfied Southern legislators (School of Library Science, University of North Carolina, 1982). The legislation emphatically encouraged the states to develop their own plans. Alabama authorized an amount equal to twenty cents per capita to be spent from state funds to support public libraries. Clearly the act was not to interfere with state or local initiatives or responsibilities in the conduct of public library services. "The determination of the best uses of the funds provided....shall be reserved to the states and their local subdivisions" (Gardner, 1971, p. 196).

Congress appropriated \$7.5 million for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1957. For the next nine fiscal years, this sum remained unchanged. Only states with plans approved by the Commissioner of Education (now the Secretary of Education) would receive funds. The U.S. Office of Education (now Department) established the Federal Library Agency (FLA) in 1938. Created after a successful American Library Association lobbying effort in the 1930s, the agency primarily conducted surveys and provided technical assistance. After enactment of LSA, the agency began to take on the task of grants management (Molz, 1990, pp. 7-8). State library agencies wishing to apply for LSA funding submitted their plans to FLA for approval.

Each state library agency (or its equivalent) was to determine whether or not its library services were inadequate and report the findings in the state plan they submitted to the Federal Library Agency. To be approved, a state plan for the extension of public library services to rural areas had to include policies and methods of administration, which would, in the FLA's judgment, assure use of federal funds to maximum advantage in the further extension of public library services to rural areas. State plans were to target for improvement those areas identified either without such services or inadequate services (Gardner, 1971, p. 197).

Although many states developed plans as a result of the LSA and the funding it provided, Southern states took the earliest advantage of the program. The small number of public libraries in Southern states, coupled with the existence of plans for extension of library service in those states, led to an early flow of LSA funding to those states. In New England and parts of the Midwest, the existence of many small public libraries proved to be a problem (School of Library Science, 1982). In addition, the LSA population cap of 10,000 was too low, and many libraries could not meet the requirements under the legislation. The legislation allowed for the pooling of resources, and in some areas this led to regionalization of library services. It was also clear that a lack of state plans in some regions was not the only issue hindering the extension of the LSA program. New England states, and many of the libraries located in them, looked askance at federal aid and did not request it. For several years, Indiana would not take federal aid because the governor said he "didn't want Hoosiers brainwashed by books chosen by federal bureaucrats" (School of Library Science, 1982). In North Carolina, a library could not qualify for federal or state funding unless there was a trained librarian, promoting the view that a good library required capable staff (School of Library Science, 1982).

The LSA program went forward and, from the funding appropriated, the Commissioner of Education would allocate an amount to each state submitting an approved plan. The plan had to show that the state would provide direct or indirect extension of service for rural libraries,

with a sum equal to the percentage of the total rural population of the United States that was found in that state. In addition, there was a formula for the federal share that would go to each qualified state. The federal share for any state "shall be 100 per cent less the state percentage, and the state percentage shall be that percentage which bears the same ratio to 50 per cent as the per capita income of such state bears to the per capita income of all the states, except that the federal share shall be in no case more than 66 per cent or less than 33 per cent" (Gardner, 1971, p. 197). If this seems at all confusing, it is no less confusing than the formulas used by some states to define state aid for libraries. Inserting language requiring the states to contribute to the cost on a percentage basis in order to receive federal assistance provided incentives for states to support public libraries through state appropriations. Although President Eisenhower signed the Library Services Act (Public Law 84-597), his comments spoke of a "limited Federal program" (Molz, 1990, p. 14).

The act was intended to stimulate the states and localities to provide library services to rural areas or, more precisely, to those areas of 10,000 and under in population. Meant to benefit the 33 million Americans who had no library services, and the 35 million Americans with inadequate services, there was "an almost naive belief that, once library service could be demonstrated to citizens, they would demand that it be continued" (Holley & Schremser, 1983, p. 16). The act was scheduled to terminate on June 30, 1961. Congress authorized \$30 million during the first four years, although less was actually appropriated due to the slowness of some states in preparing plans (Gardner, 1971, p. 199). Congress reauthorized LSA for another five years in 1960 with the same level of funding and with rural libraries still being the focus of the legislation. A growing number of LSA supporters urged that the act be broadened. Representative William Green of Pennsylvania introduced House Resolution 402 in August 1957 to "study the problems of providing adequate public library services to our metropolitan areas..." (Holley & Schremser, 1983, p. 39). This resolution went no further than the House Rules Committee, but it pointed out that the focus on rural libraries was no longer paramount. By 1962, the American Library Association's legislative efforts included three recommended changes in the *Library Services Act*. According to Holley and Schremser (1983):

1. Remove the 10,000 population limit and extend the public library development program to all population groups.
2. Increase proportionally the authorization of \$7.5 million to \$20 million annually.
3. Change the expiration date of the Act from June 30, 1966 to June 30, 1968 (pp. 53-54).

LSA BECOMES LSCA

In 1964, Congress passed an amended act, called the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). President John F. Kennedy was a supporter of library legislation and, in a message to Congress in 1963 about education, he mentioned libraries six times and outlined three specific programs to strengthen public as well as college and university facilities (Ladenson, 1982, pp. 124-25). The addition of library construction programs to the legislation was a hard fought battle that culminated in the introduction of the Library Services and Construction Act for debate on the Senate floor. The date was November 22, 1963 and, during the debate, news of the assassination of President Kennedy reached the Senate floor. In short order, the Senate suspended after a brief prayer and was not in session again until after President Kennedy's funeral. Charlie Lee, a staff member for Senator Wayne Morse, a supporter of the act, later recalled:

And when we came back into session after the funeral, the act was picked up and [at] that point the sentiment of the Senate had crystallized and the sentiment of the House had crystallized. This bill passed really as a memorial tribute to President Kennedy. It's a macabre association but it did save the construction authority. (Holley & Schremser, 1983, p. 66)

Lee goes on to make the point that, by implication, every library built or renovated using LSCA funding can be construed to be a partial presidential library in honor of President Kennedy. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the act into law on February 11, 1964.

Congress reauthorized LSCA several times since 1964 with one notable change in 1977. Continuing a trend away from a focus on rural libraries, Congress again modified LSCA with the addition of a section providing funds for large urban libraries. Called MURL, which stands for Municipal and Urban Resource Libraries, the change provided funds for preselected major libraries in each state whose collections were viewed as resources for a larger area of that state. The focus on major urban libraries was less a retreat from the original goals of LSA to extend service to the unserved than the recognition that library resources in major urban libraries were shared and needed to be improved.

LSA AND LSCA FUNDING LEVELS

As early as 1956, Congress realized that the funding authorized under LSA (\$38 million for five years) would not be enough to solve the problems identified as well as bring new libraries into existence. In 1965, Congress amended LSA under the title of "The Library Services and Construction Act of 1965" to broaden the scope of the act to include grants for the construction of library facilities. Congress also addressed the need

to support urban libraries as well as those in rural areas. The changes required the allocation of funds based on a formula that factored in population and income, the revision of state planning requirements, and an increase in matching funds from wealthier states (Government studies and systems, 1977, pp. 34-35). Funding for LSCA jumped from \$7.5 million in FY 1964 to \$55 million in FY 1965 and reached its highest level in FY 1973, when it stood at \$84.5 million. Congress eliminated the funding for Title II, the construction program, and did not fund it again for more than a decade. In FY 1974, funding dropped to \$49,200,000, but rose again to \$60,200,000 by FY 1977. Since 1977, funding had fluctuated. However the 1980s saw consistent declines in the level of funding. Federal sources as a percentage of public library income was dropping and comprised only 1.0 percent of the total public library income in 1992. U.S. Department of Education library statistics published since 1989 show the trend (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. FEDERAL LIBRARY FUNDING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

<i>Year</i>	<i>Federal Income</i>	<i>Percentage of Public Library Income from Federal Income</i>
1989	\$57,057,775	1.4%
1990	\$55,622,109	1.3%
1991	\$55,819,169	1.2%
1992	\$49,973,390	1.0%

Source: Chute, 1992, 1993; Chute & Kroe, 1994; Podolsky, 1991.

In 1991, the Bush Administration proposed zeroing out LSCA for FY 1992, reasoning that the program had accomplished its mission, and that federal funding was no longer needed. The administration concluded that state and local governments could (and should) provide their own funding to carry on the goals (Cooke, 1992, p. 31). Congress prevailed, however, and continued the funding. This was just one of the assaults on LSCA funding that began in the 1980s and continues today.

LSCA INTO THE FUTURE

During the debate over reauthorization of LSCA in 1990, many in Congress questioned whether the program could continue to survive given the efforts of a succession of administrations in the 1980s to eliminate it. Proponents of LSCA assured Congress that the 1991 White House Conference on Library and Information Services would provide an opportunity to show the resolve of the library community to work together. The community's common goal would be providing all Americans with library and information services, in particular those groups often neglected, underserved, or overlooked. A "Task Force on LSCA Reauthorization" put forth a plan for the restructuring and updating of LSCA. Represent-

ing the American Library Association, the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the Urban Libraries Council, the task force proposed an act that was similar in several ways to its predecessors. The act was to be state-based and would support programs based on state plans. However, the act was to be flexible, with as few separate titles as possible, and would support cooperative activities. The task force recognized that, because the fiscal capacity of local governments varies, "federal and state funding is needed to ensure equitable library service" (Task Force on LSCA Reauthorization, 1993, p. 2). The task force proposed using forward funding to provide continuity.

The task force suggested several policy options, and it was left to the states to use their discretion to develop programs that would address them. Title A, as proposed, would deal with access to technology and linkage to the National Research and Education Network, cost sharing of technology, projects emphasizing economic development, and the dissemination of local, state, and federal government information. Title B as proposed would deal with access to special services. Title B included special programs such as lifelong learning, children and youth projects, and national priority projects for native Americans and Americans with disabilities. In addition, Title B included a second emphasis in areas of special demographic concern and addressed rural library problems. The task force included projects for distance learning, information access from remote areas, and library resource delivery to isolated populations in addition to leveraging local support for core library service development for rural areas with a limited tax base (Task Force on LSCA Reauthorization, 1993, p. 4). It also addressed urban libraries under areas of special demographic concern. It is interesting to note that rural areas are the last emphasis identified in the draft. Clearly LSCA is continuing to move away from its original intention of supporting rural libraries to that of a program in which rural areas are but a demographic emphasis at the end of a long list of programs.

THE STATE ROLE—HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The passage of the Library Services Act in 1956 was a landmark in the history of federal public library legislation. It served in large measure to compel the states to contribute to the overall cost of public library service on a percentage basis if they were to apply for a grant. LSA was to become an incentive for increased state aid. State aid for public libraries in the United States also has a very interesting evolution.

Efforts at providing state aid to local libraries goes back much earlier than 1956. "In 1835 New York adopted a law authorizing each school district to levy a tax for the establishment of a public-library collection" (Ladenson, 1982, p. 60). Three years later, New York began an annual

grant program made possible by federal surplus funds that had been turned over to the states. Under the Deposit Act of 1836, states could use such funds for a variety of purposes. In 1890, Massachusetts established a Board of Library Commissioners and authorized a program of state aid. Within a few years, ten states in the New England and Middle Atlantic areas adopted this model (Ladenson, 1982, p. 61). The 1930s saw an increase in state financial assistance to local libraries as a direct result of the Great Depression. Many states began appropriating funds to distribute to public libraries for the purchase of books and other materials. In the late 1930s, new laws were passed in states such as Michigan, Arkansas, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania for state aid programs to help establish county and regional libraries. By the 1980s, virtually all states provided some form of aid to public libraries, and most of them provided some form of direct financial aid.

STATE FUNDING OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) tabulates public library statistics each year, primarily from information supplied by the chief state library officer in each state. The extensive tables give statistics on a variety of public library subjects, from population served and number of librarians with an MLS degree, to the per capita costs for materials and personnel. This article focuses on statistics concerning libraries serving populations of 10,000 or fewer, and in particular, the income sources received by those libraries. In the latest four editions of the NCES report, total state aid to all U.S. public libraries amounted to nearly 8 percent of the total income for all libraries in 1989. In 1990, this rose to 14 percent and dropped in 1991 and 1992 to 13 percent and 12 percent respectively (Chute, 1992, 1993; Chute & Kroe, 1994; Podolsky, 1991). Like federal aid, state aid is only a small portion of the total income of public libraries. By far the largest segment of public library income is provided from local sources.

TYPES OF STATE AID

Ladenson (1982) identifies three kinds of state aid programs for public libraries:

1. grants available to every public library that meets required standards;
2. grants to support the operation of cooperative public or multitype library systems or networks; and
3. grants to assist in the construction of public library buildings.

There can be no generalizations on how the states employ formulas to distribute funds. Each state utilizes a different formula. In one case, Hawaii's state library agency is the sole provider of library services on the

islands. The Hawaiian Library Law, passed in 1955, created a free circulating library called the Library of Hawaii. The service "provides direct operation of all community libraries in the state, including a library for the blind, planning of library programmes in all public schools, centralized ordering, cataloguing and binding for all school libraries, central reference services, bookmobile services and in-service training" (Gardner, 1971, p. 193).

Some formulas are simply based on the population served by the public library. As long as the library meets certain state-set minimum standards, it receives funding based on a population formula. Some states require that local support in the form of tax levies or appropriations must meet a certain threshold. It is difficult to pinpoint what specific states are now doing, for funding formulas, as levels of funding, have changed radically over the past decade. Certain cases, such as the law adopted in Michigan that provided state funding for the entire Detroit Public Library budget, are significant. In this particular case, the legislature considered the library a statewide resource facility and passed the law relieving city taxpayers of the burden of levying local taxes for the library budget (Ladenson 1982, p. 63).

Ladenson (1982) indicates the final report of a study, *Improving State Aid to Public Libraries*, commissioned by the Urban Libraries Council and issued in January 1977, is as valid today as it was when issued. The findings of the study conclude:

1. There is a need and valid rationale for state government to increase aid to public libraries.
2. The fiscal condition of many of the states is such that it permits them to assume a greater proportion of the financial support of public libraries.
3. Library expenditures have not kept pace with similar public expenditures or with inflation.
4. The historical development and growth of public education and public libraries are parallel and represent a comparable response to the same societal needs for education and knowledge.
5. Public libraries have felt the effects of the fiscal crunch more than most local services, because, more than most functions, they have depended on local revenue sources for their funding. (pp. 64-65)

However regressive local property taxes may be, relying on increased funds from state library agencies can be problematic. The passage of Proposition 98 in California and the ensuing state legislation provided for the rerouting of funds earmarked for special districts—including libraries—to the public school system. "General fund libraries also lost support as the library and other departments of the county competed with local law enforcement for funds" (Anderson, 1994, p. 401). The

resulting drastic cuts in state aid affected rural as well as urban libraries in the state. Although an excellent goal, increased state aid to public libraries remains an elusive dream in most states.

USE OF STATE AID

State funding provides little more than a supplement to local funds. "States generally have assumed a role that is primarily as provider of standards for local libraries in matters of finance, facilities, and personnel" (Dubberly, 1992, p. 39). State library agencies enforce standards by requiring audits, certification of librarians, as well as mandating certain collection standards. Libraries seeking federal funds through their state library agencies are usually required to meet these minimum standards to be considered. Interestingly, the role of state library agencies in promoting library services in their states is an outgrowth of the federal LSA legislation of the late 1950s. As mentioned earlier in this article, to qualify for federal funding, a state plan for the extension of library services to rural areas had to be reported to the Federal Library Agency. In effect, federal funding followed state plans for improving rural library services, often through financial incentives (Curley, 1990, p. 66). Traditionally, the concern of state governments was service to rural and unincorporated areas. Curley indicates that by the 1980s nearly all the states provided some form of support for library service.

A comparison of NCES statistics for state funding shows that in 1989, one type and size of library had a higher percentage of state funding than the national average. The figure reported was 9.6 percent state funding for libraries serving fewer than 1,000 individuals. Given that there were 915 libraries in this group, for a total state funding income figure of \$883,728, each library would average just over \$965 in state funding. By comparison, that same year, eighteen libraries serving 1 million or more individuals garnered 14.3 percent of the total state income. This income totaled \$88,794,684 for an average of nearly \$5 million per library. Although the reasons for this seeming imbalance vary, it is clear that per capita state funding for these large urban libraries is nearly five times that of the smallest libraries. As Curley (1990) points out, "the pattern varies widely from support for cooperative or regional services to direct per capita aid. In a few states, modest aid to major urban libraries has been achieved, in recognition of service borders or resources of more than local importance" (p. 66). Some state library agencies have made a conscious decision to provide major funding to urban libraries because these libraries are under pressure to loan materials through interlibrary loan to smaller libraries across the state. In this respect, funding the larger libraries provides benefits to even the smallest rural libraries in terms of access to materials. However, the issue of "fairness" often crops up and,

for most state library agencies, "the prevailing pattern has been small support to virtually all communities rather than significant aid for the special few" (Curley 1990, p. 66).

STATE RESPONSIBILITIES—THE PENNSYLVANIA MODEL

The small amount of funding for public libraries from state library agencies does not diminish its importance. State plans for library services clearly delineate the responsibilities the local libraries have and what standards must be met. By implication, the quality of library services is monitored by state library agencies in order to determine whether the local libraries meet the state standards. The creation of cooperative arrangements within states, underwritten by state library agency funding, is an indirect benefit to even the smallest library. In Pennsylvania, the state-wide system, called ACCESS Pennsylvania, allows users of more than 1,326 participating libraries to borrow freely from other participating libraries across the state. A database on CD-ROM identifies each unique title held in the state and its location. More than 3,200,000 distinct titles are now in the database. Small rural libraries may access the database either by viewing the discs and requesting materials via interlibrary loan or by sending requests to their district library. Pennsylvania has twenty-eight district libraries which are given additional state aid to help the smaller libraries in their region. Located in all regions of the state, nearly the entire populace is served by a district library. As one of the most rural states, Pennsylvania has created a system that utilizes state aid to assist larger libraries in providing service to smaller ones.

Direct aid to libraries in Pennsylvania has been based on a formula that is quite complicated. Several types of aid are identified depending on whether a library is a county system as well as how many people it serves. In addition, the formula includes a "local effort" component that provides local libraries with some leverage to acquire more local funds. If local funding rises to a certain level, it can be partly matched by the state, making the formula more of a "carrot and stick." In this way, state aid is designed in part to leverage more local funding. Indirect aid, such as the funding for district libraries, provides services from the larger resource libraries to the smaller libraries. In order to participate in any state aid program however, local libraries must meet certain state standards. These include everything from the number of books and periodical subscriptions per capita to the qualifications of the librarian based on library size and population served. Libraries that do not meet the standards do not qualify for state aid. Even though the level of state aid remains relatively low, local libraries continue to rely on it as an important source of operating income.

STATE AID UNDER ATTACK

In the 1970s, California's Proposition 13, a tax limitation referendum, sent a shock wave throughout the country. The success of this referendum led to movements in other states to do likewise. For public

libraries, it was a time of decreasing state aid as states reduced tax support for state library agencies. Many states reallocated LSCA funds to replace state aid while still maintaining the premise that those federal funds were being spent to meet the goals of the act. Many states still handle LSCA funds in this manner, and it has turned "into a swap of federal for state and local dollar" (White, 1992, p. 49). The climate of tax cutting continues, and Draconian measures in Massachusetts, New York, and other states have been widely reported. Herb White (1992) comments that "low taxes are considered more important than good libraries, but obviously low taxes and good libraries, while absurd, sounds best of all" (p. 48). Further reductions in state aid in the 1990s, particularly in California, caused major problems for libraries throughout the state. Urban as well as rural libraries were affected. In 1993, California Governor Pete Wilson shifted \$2.6 billion in property taxes away from libraries, supposedly to benefit public schools in the state ("Governor slashes county...", 1993, p. 13). The State Librarian of California, Gary Strong, stated in 1993 that a shift of \$2.5 billion in tax dollars would mean a reduction of anywhere from 25% to 50% of library funding" ("CA Libs survey...", 1993, p. 20). Other states are also experiencing major budget cuts in state library funding. Until recently, Ohio had an enviable record of supporting public libraries through state appropriations. In 1993, the Ohio Library Council (OLC) began facing major multimillion dollar cuts in state funding. Ohio reduced the Library and Local Government Support Fund (LLGSF) by \$31.1 million in 1995 ("OLC facing cuts...", 1993, p. 16), severely affecting urban as well as rural libraries.

The news is not all grim. In mid 1994, the New York legislature appropriated \$81.3 million to its libraries, the largest appropriation in New York history. The governor signed the 1995-96 proposed budget ("NY gives \$81.3 M to Libraries," 1994, p. 21). Some California libraries have struggled back, having been reprieved with additional state funding. Not all efforts to increase state aid to libraries have met with resounding success throughout the country, but there are hopeful signs.

CONCLUSION

Given the fact that the majority of public libraries in the United States rely on local funding for the bulk of their operating income, it is no wonder that most libraries continue to focus their efforts on increasing local funding. Continued reductions in LSCA funding and a climate of federal budget cutting renders the entire program a target for elimination. What remains to be seen is whether a case can be made for a new act that promotes technology or whether there should be a reevaluation of the role of the federal government. Ronald Dubberly, director of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library, in an address to a conference sponsored by the Florida State University School of Library and Information Stud-

ies and the Center for Professional Development and Public Service, talked about the roles of federal, state, and local governments in providing for an effective public library future. The federal government should be actively involved in research on service effectiveness, service needs, as well as delivery methods and a developmental role. "The federal government's developmental role should encompass the formation and demonstration of service delivery models. Experimentation with multitype library delivery systems, services to rural residents, and many other areas need funding and evaluation" (Dubberly, 1992, p. 44). Dubberly examines the federal role in the area of technical development, standards, and telecommunications. He clearly states the importance of the federal role in providing assistance to rural libraries. His view of the role of state government is that it should be "predominately responsible for the functions of oversight and coordination of public library services. Planning for shared systems and service delivery improvements, ensuring fiscal and staff competence, and confirming that service delivery levels meet or exceed minimum standards," are also important state roles (Dubberly, 1992, p. 44). This explanation of roles parallels much of the contemporary practice, especially in the area of state roles. It is in this area of funding that the similarities cease.

Dubberly talks about the federal role in funding public libraries in terms of providing direct per capita funding to library systems for *compensatory* [his emphasis] services. This is the basis of a unique new methodology. "Compensatory funding for public library services would be an extension of similar federal funding for public education needs at a local level. This approach uses a funding formula that provides additional monies for augmented services directly to the disadvantaged. These could include all who are unable to use public library services due to illiteracy; insufficient learning skills and/or language proficiency; geography; physical abilities; and/or income level" (Dubberly, 1992, p. 45). The role of state governments in the new funding partnership would be to fund "public library services throughout each state at a moderate level. This level of funding would be sufficient to provide highly adequate service in all geographical areas based on individual state standards" (p. 45).

Many may consider these ideas to be radical, however there is a strong case to be made for changing the paradigms as Dubberly points out in his address. Whether or not changes can be made in the way public libraries are funded, and whether there is still a case to be made for rural libraries, remains to be seen. The future for rural libraries is not hopeful without significant changes in the way funds are allocated as well as increased funding being made available from state and federal governments.

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Role of the Public Library Trustee

JOHN CHRISTENSON

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE functions, roles, and responsibilities of the public library trustee in a rural setting. It reviews the basic responsibilities of the library trustee to ensure that the rural library serves the information needs of the community. The author emphasizes the important role the library trustee serves in determining policy, encouraging partnerships with other libraries and community organizations, and ensuring sufficient funding for the library to meet community information needs.

INTRODUCTION

The public library trustee in America is a unique governmental position that is unlike any other citizen governing group position. The library board does not have the same function as a city council, park and recreation board, police review commission, school district board, or a historical society, but it does share some of the same responsibilities, such as building ownership, fund-raising, governance, budgeting, and public relations. The governmental functions of library boards of trustees vary widely from state to state, within states, from county to county and within counties, and from municipality to municipality, but there is a commonality that is distinct to the provision of public library service. Basically, the library board of trustees is an appointed group of citizens to whom the governance of programs and services of the public library are entrusted on behalf of the general public by local government. The public library trustee represents the library to the community and the community to the library.

The trustee is the citizen representative responsible for providing the best possible library service to the community from which the board is appointed or, in a few communities, elected. The basic functions of the rural library trustee in many ways are not that different from the trustee of a large urban library. Both rural and urban trustees are responsible for governance, policy, community and public relations, budgeting, and leadership.

In addition, the rural trustee has responsibilities and functions not usually common to the board member of a large city library or affluent suburban county library system. These can include running the library for the librarian when the entire staff participates in a continuing education function or helping with story hour during a sudden overflow of kids. Often in a small library, the board members are the library's most useful volunteers.

Rural library trustees have the advantage over their urban colleagues in terms of relationships to the community and local funding authorities. In almost all small communities, the trustees personally know elected and appointed government officials, and in fact, they are often related. Since the majority of trustees have usually already been viable community leaders, they will have been serving side by side with the other community leaders on PTAs, church committees, volunteer fire departments, and all of the other boards and committees that make small towns function. This existing extraordinary community relationship makes it easier for the rural trustee to make a case for an adequate operating budget or for a one-time capital budget for a new building or library automation program.

Even in the smallest library, it must be remembered that the library board represents overall citizen's control of the library, whereas the librarian is responsible for carrying out the administration and technical work.

BASIC DUTIES

The paramount responsibilities of the rural library trustee are as follows:

- *The library trustee meets the needs of the people served by the library.*
- *There are important legal and budgeting functions, but basically the reason library boards exist is to make sure that the library serves the information needs of the community.* The basis of every board decision should always be how that decision helps serve the people of the community better.
- *The library trustee sets policies that guide the library.* The primary function of the board is to develop policies that ensure that the library is run effectively, legally, and economically. These policies

concerning personnel, material selection, and public use regulations set the standard for the librarian who implements the policies and manages the library by them.

- *The library trustee develops a plan of library service outlining the long-range goals for the library's growth and development.* Goals should be projected two to ten years into the future. By planning for at least two years, the board formulates long-range plans that will guide the librarian's short-term administration over the next twelve to eighteen months.
- *The library trustee ensures that the library is financed adequately, and that the budget is being spent responsibly.* As the board sets policies and develops long-range plans, it needs to assess the ability of the library, and its funding body, to finance the plans. The board also needs to be sure that there are enough real dollars in the treasury to cover ongoing costs. However, despite the fact that the trustees are responsible for ensuring that funds are well spent, it does not mean that every little expenditure must be approved. The trustee should determine that the money is spent to deliver the library programs and services authorized in the annual budget by relying on financial and performance audits.
- *The library trustee supports the librarian's management of the daily operations of the library.* This is one of the most basic responsibilities of the library board. The board's role is to select and hire the very best person for the job and then provide the direction that it wants the library to take. When the board has given informed direction to that librarian, the librarian must be allowed to manage. To be sure of the direction the library is taking, the board must establish a mechanism for periodic evaluation of the librarian and of the library and its services.

TRUSTEE QUALIFICATIONS

Anyone appointed to a library board is potentially qualified to be outstanding as a library trustee. However, no trustee is ever perfectly qualified to master all of the duties of the board when appointed for the first time.

Every person appointed to the board brings personal strengths, experiences, and talents that will serve the library. A prospective board member should feel an informed and sincere interest for public library service. Trustees who are pressured to join the board without an interest in libraries, reading, or the provision of information may never be strong supporters. On the other hand, persons appointed to the board just because they "love to read" often get bored with the details of local government and budgeting problems.

Board members should be selected for the special talents that they can contribute. Expert knowledge in banking, computers, or the governmental process is valuable for specific projects. Attorneys, accountants, contractors, and others with expertise are useful to the board provided their advice is free, appropriate, and rooted in a sincere concern for excellent library service.

The broad spectrum of community interests, geographic areas, jobs, and ethnic backgrounds should be represented on the board. In a small town, care must be taken to avoid over-representation by any single political, religious, or community group such as Kiwanis or the Women's Club. This is often difficult in a rural area because of the smaller pool of available library supporters, but a board consisting of diverse viewpoints is very important in assuring that the library will serve the total community.

Potential and new trustees need to know that service on a library board will take their time and their energy and possibly their financial support if a building project looms in the future. Boards need members who will actively advocate for the tax revenue funds needed to fulfill the information needs of their community. They must be willing to seek funding in competition with roads, sewers, ditches, fire protection, and other local government concerns.

While the librarian should not be directly involved in the selection of board members, an alert librarian can supply names of likely candidates from the community for consideration. Although qualified individuals make up the board, collectively the board will have its own personality. Desirable board characteristics include political savvy; occupational mix; varied personal interests; business management skills; optimism; and diversity in age, gender, and ethnic background.

BOARD POLICYMAKING

The role of policymaking is perhaps the biggest component of a rural library trustee's job and is often the most confusing. Just "who does what" is often the problem, particularly in the small library. Board members, and librarians for that matter, are not sure which decisions are policy and which are considered management. A simplistic but useful guide is that usually policy decisions are those that affect the library as a whole and management decisions affect individual programs, services, or people.

Understanding the role of the rural public librarian will help library board members understand their policymaking function. The librarian must organize the internal service structure of the library and develop procedures which best utilize this structure. A board member might not like the placement of a bulletin board or location of a new books display,

but these are management decisions. The librarian should be in charge of hiring, firing, evaluating, and disciplining all staff members. The board, on the other hand, is only responsible for one employee: the librarian.

The supervision of staff, and the relationship of individual board members to the staff, can cause some very vexing situations in the small library. Often board members in rural communities will have had long friendships with individual staff members through churches, school functions, and just plain "growing up together." Board members need to step back and let the librarian and the board's personnel committee work the "people" situations out. This can be especially difficult when one of the library's users or someone on the city council asks a board member to intervene in a personnel problem.

Carefully wrought personnel policies defining job descriptions, salary structures, grievance procedures, and benefits are very important responsibilities of the board. Staff supervision, personnel management, and policy implementation are duties of the librarian.

A competent librarian motivates staff, giving them direction and ensures two-way communication. Board members are leaders of the whole library structure, not leaders of the staff. The librarian inspires, directs, and leads the staff, and the board directs and leads through the librarian.

The library board sets and approves the annual budget, but the librarian makes the day-to-day decisions about how the budgeted money is spent. It is tempting for board members, particularly when they see something is not quite right, to jump in and try to control what goes on. The most important principle for board members to learn is to stand back and give the librarian the opportunity to run the library. The major part of the librarian's job is often one of day-to-day and short-term duties. The role of the board member is to develop a road map of library policies over a long span of time.

While the librarian is responsible for administering personnel policy, some board and staff interaction is desirable. Staff attendance at board meetings, including a brief presentation by individual staff members as to what they do in their daily work, will give trustees a better understanding of library functions. Board recognition of individual employees for outstanding work can be very beneficial for morale. Formal recognition for years of service, for successful special project completion, or for new ideas, is always appreciated by staff members.

All libraries, even the smallest one or two person operation, should have an up-to-date board-approved policy manual readily available for staff, board members, local officials, and the general public. The easiest way to prepare a policy manual is to borrow other libraries' manuals from the state library and compare these with policies already established by

the board. The kinds of specific policies are as varied as the many different aspects of library service; local needs and situations will determine the contents and details of an individual library's policies.

Elizabeth Kingseed (1988), former assistant state librarian, New Hampshire State Library, has developed a very useful seven-page "Guidelines for a Library Policy," which is included in Virginia G. Young's (1988) also very useful book *The Library Trustee: A Practical Guidebook*.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnering is equally as important a task for the rural library trustee as policy development. The rural library is the chief information source for its community and cannot stand by itself isolated from all other available information resources.

The role of the small public library as an access point to the vast world of information is proving to be one of its most important roles. The exploding development of online databases, Internet services, online catalog networks, electronic reference sources, and interactive multimedia CD-ROMS is not limited to use in large city libraries. The demand for this new world of information must be met by small rural libraries at a time when many are struggling to keep up with the demand for current best-sellers in book format.

According to the 1991 U.S. Congress Office of Technology Assessment report (1991):

how well rural areas cope with their economic problems depends not only on their present situation and resources but also on future developments and events. There are three major trends that will likely affect rural communities:

1. the shift to an information-based economy and the enhanced role of communication and information as a strategic weapon in business;
2. the emergence of a global economy and hence the growing need to compete on a worldwide basis; and
3. a growing concern about the environment and the environmental costs of economic development.

These trends are eroding the boundaries of rural communities, making these communities more dependent on external events. (p. 45)

Representative David Minge, from Minnesota's second congressional district, testified before a House Technology, Environment and Aviation Committee in July 1994 on why rural America must be part of the "information highway."

He pointed out that President Eisenhower's vision in the 1950s of an America connected by superhighways led to the building of our interstate highway system. Almost a century before, America experienced great rural growth after building another transportation system: railroads.

As the new American highway system is developed—called the information superhighway—rural people should be concerned. Minge said that rural America cannot afford to have the ramps to the information highway closed, nor can it afford to be road kill. The congressman illustrated several uses for information technology in a rural setting:

Farmers with similar problems could quickly share solutions; Up-to-the-minute weather and market reports could be accessed from home whenever a farmer needed information; Rural doctors could quickly receive a second opinion by transmitting an x-ray to a specialist in an urban area; A rural school district could offer more topics by hooking a class into a fiber-optic network and receiving an interactive broadcast of a similar class being held thousands of miles away. ("Rural Areas...", 1994, p. 3)

Finally, Minge concluded that, as a nation, we all will benefit when everyone has access to this system, and everyone can be reached through this system, just like mail delivery or telephone service. "We cannot afford to penalize those who live in rural areas," he said. "Those without access to the information highway will not have access to the 21st Century" ("Rural Areas...", 1994, p. 3).

The rural library trustee needs to ensure that the library must also be a traveler on Minge's superhighway, or they might not have access to the twenty-first century. Just a short time ago, even after most of Eisenhower's superhighways were built, libraries were pretty much as they always had been for the past sixty or seventy years or more.

The State Library of Iowa recently asked librarians and trustees throughout the state to contemplate the role of libraries in the Information Age and to address the question about the accessibility of information for all Iowa citizens. They developed a vision for the library of the future that outlined new functions for the delivery of information:

Current library practice is changing dramatically. For example, libraries have concentrated on enlarging collections of locally owned materials. Now, the emphasis will shift from *ownership* to *access* for lesser used items or time/date sensitive information.

Connected libraries will:

- Provide gateway services by linking customers, in person and electronically, to the electronic highway;
- Host information by supporting electronic information files as well as providing links to external information sources;
- Publish electronic information through the creation and maintenance of unique files of local information;
- Serve as consultants, constantly shifting and rapidly increasing the array of information available. (State Library of Iowa, 1994, p. 3)

Partnering with other libraries and information resources in a large geographic area while retaining local support and governance has always been a delicate balancing act for the small public library. Because of the

unique governance structure of library boards, libraries are able to engage in more cooperation and partnership ventures beyond their municipal and county boundaries than any other local government entities.

Police and fire departments often provide mutual assistance to surrounding communities, but they do not globally share resources as do local public libraries. No other municipal or county departments have the capacity to be tied together in such an efficient and cost-effective variety of local, regional, state, and national networks as rural libraries.

Many rural library board members find that their function as a trustee includes service far beyond their small town library. In addition to their local board, they may also be board members of county and regional library networks with meetings entailing a journey of 100-mile round trips to represent their community interests in new partnerships.

The autonomy and policymaking prerogatives of the local boards may be sorely tried when cooperative resource sharing requires collective policies or when an electronic online network requires substantial local funding for a computer mainframe located fifty miles away.

Another form of library partnering is the development and encouragement of a Friends of the Library group. Friends can be seen as the community outreach arm of the library, assisting the board in community and public relations. Friends can support the policies of the library board and can play a major role in explaining and integrating policy.

The ideal library partnership is that trustees set policy, the librarian carries it out, and the Friends support it. Volunteers are extremely important in small libraries, but occasionally conflict arises between volunteers and part-time staff members. A formal volunteer program under the umbrella of an organized Friends group can eliminate most of the turf problems in the rural library setting.

The single most important partnering for the trustee is the partnership between the library board and the librarian. The backbone of this very basic partnering is communication—discussing issues and exchanging information. The time during the board meeting when the librarian's report is delivered can be the springboard for discussion, evaluation, and exchange of ideas between the librarian and the board and among individual board members.

THE TRUSTEE AS PLANNER AND BUILDER

A rural library board dependent upon a parsimonious city council for financial nourishment or dependent upon a county or regional network for automation of operational functions may feel that long-range planning is a futile exercise. For that library, or any other library, not to do planning is similar to driving cross country without a road map. The board may accidentally get where it wants to go, but the journey may be time consuming, expensive, and filled with potholes.

The elementary first step in the planning process is to decide what kind of library the community should have. A library board's prime objective should be to define the mission of the library in order to meet the information desires and needs of the community and to evaluate the effectiveness of the library in fulfilling that mission.

There are many useful books and guidelines that will help the library board, but the following are among the most practical:

Planning and Role Setting for Public Libraries: A Manual of Options and Procedures by Charles R. McClure;

Output Measures for Public Libraries by Nancy A. Van House et al.;

"What's Good?": *Describing Your Public Library's Effectiveness* by Thomas A. Childers and Nancy A. Van House; and

Managing Change: A How-To-Do-It Manual for Planning, Implementing and Evaluating Change in Libraries by Susan C. Curzon.

People may live in a small town all their lives and never know some of the interesting basic facts about the community. Many citizens—possibly a library trustee, the town's clerk, or even the mayor—may not know the town's elevation, the percentage of people with a high school or college education, number of people below the poverty level, or the number of people over the age of sixty-five. They may not be aware that, for example, 63 percent of the population has a library card or 23 percent use a neighboring town's library, or half of the users rate the book collection as "fair."

Trying to plan without collecting information about the community and the library is like drawing that road map without naming the towns. The board may be pursuing a direction without knowing where they are when they get there. The information required for library planning includes locating the demographic data about the town from census reports of several years; finding state and regional planning agency reports; doing an evaluation of the library's current performance; and surveying residents, library users, and staff.

After the needs of the people served by the library are determined, the board and staff together must decide on the operations and services required to fill the needs. They must figure out the cost of the plans and determine where the funding will come from.

At this point, for some reason, after much hard work, many long-range plans end up on a shelf forgotten. It is incumbent on the board, in partnership with local officials, professional planners, and community leaders, to develop an action plan for implementation of the library's full road map to the future.

Long-range planning for services and operations should be undertaken for a period of at least two to ten years in the future. In planning for a new updated or remodeled library building, the board should look

at space needs for the next twenty years. The library board has a fundamental responsibility to the community to provide an adequate facility for the delivery of information services.

The small town library board members will find that the building development process will be the most exciting, frustrating, harrowing, and rewarding experience of their trustee tenure. Swan (1992) summarizes the library building process as follows:

1. Involve the entire community as much as possible.
2. Develop a plan based on community needs.
3. Hire professionals to do what they do best—planning, fundraising, and architecture. Do not be afraid to pay for their services—they are worth it.
4. Get realistic cost estimates—then add 10 percent.
5. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate! Let everyone know what you are doing as often as you can and in as many ways as you can.
6. Coordinate the efforts of various groups. Do not let one group keep the others in the dark.
7. Share the credit or, better yet, give it to others. It will make you look good.

FINANCE AND THE TRUSTEE

The most important financial role for the rural library trustee is not worrying about copying machine cost overruns but making sure that the library is adequately funded to serve community needs. The board is responsible for ensuring that the library is getting a fair share of available tax revenue from its funding authority.

The city or county providing the tax support for library service will have an annual timetable and procedure for submitting requests for funding of local government operations. The library board should review this timetable process at its first meeting of the new fiscal year and begin developing a strategy for obtaining reasonable support for its operations.

Adequate local government funding usually follows good performance, perceived needs, and "squeaky wheels." Policy development, long-range planning, an appreciated service structure, reliable budgeting, accurate facts and figures, and a notable presentation by trustees will help convince local government officials that the library is as deserving of funds as a new animal control vehicle or updated fire hoses.

In addition to the trustees' responsibility in lobbying with local government to adequately fund the small library, they should also keep the library's programs and needs before the general public and seek out sources of local giving. Fund-raising, beyond the support from tax revenue, is an important aspect of membership on any nonprofit board. The board should periodically consider and approve a fund-raising rationale and plan a "case statement." This is a written statement documenting the purpose and need of the fund-raising. This case is built upon the library's mission statement and long-range plans. The case should clearly answer the questions of why the organization needs money and how it will be used.

Seymour (1988) suggests that the "case statement" for fund-raising should "aim high, provide perspective, arouse a sense of history and continuity, convey a feeling of importance, relevance, and urgency, and have whatever stuff is needed to warm the heart and stir the mind" (p. 43).

The library board embarking on fund-raising ventures should remember to partner with the librarian and the Friends of the Library. Fund-raising is often the primary function of Friends groups and sometimes it is only the Friends, not the library board, that can legally raise money through sales.

PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The small public library, without a planned public relations program, may often have a higher per capita circulation than a large library with a public relations specialist on staff. So why would the rural library trustee support an organized public relations effort when, for the moment, the library is well used?

The most important reason is that promotion of the library to the public as the community's most important information provider will become more and more difficult as society travels further down the information superhighway. Many other information resources, such as extension services, cable TV, bookstore chains, Internet, commercial databases, video stores, and for-profit information agencies will be competing for patrons' attention and money.

The complacent small town library relying on high circulation figures derived from best-sellers and picture books will not exist successfully in the twenty-first century. The library public relations (PR) program, like all other library programs, must be carefully researched and planned. The research should involve learning the nature of the community served by the library and finding out community attitudes toward the library. Open communication with all local news media sources is essential.

The role of the trustee in public relations is to develop planning tools, to formulate public relations policies, and to be a very loud advocate of the library. Ongoing dialogue with community members is essential so that the board can respond to community and individual concerns and needs. At the same time, board members need to let the public know about the good things their library is accomplishing. Often in budget development during tight times, the library board eliminates public relations line items as nonessential. If the public does not learn why the library is important and useful to them, the library itself will become the nonessential item.

EVALUATION

Every year the rural library board needs to stand back from its usual preoccupation and reflect on how the board is meeting its responsibilities. A good time to do this is at the beginning of the year after the

statistics from the previous year have been gathered and as the budget process gets underway. Planning is a continuous process and boards must assess and evaluate the progress of the plans that have been crafted for the library.

Young (1988) provides excellent examples of trustee evaluation score cards—one developed by the Missouri State Library and the other by the Allen Parish Library in Louisiana. They are different and could be used by the board in alternate years (p. 197). The most useful tool for evaluating the librarian is *Evaluating the Library Director* (Bolt, 1983), a publication of the American Library Trustee Association.

In addition to evaluating itself—and the librarian, of course—the board should also undertake output measures of the library. Output measures will allow the trustee to learn how useful and beneficial the library is to the community. These measure use, effectiveness, and extensiveness of services. Output measures include circulation per capita, library visits per capita, registered borrowers as a percentage of population, reference fill rate, and stock turnover rate. The American Library Association has published several easy-to-use guides for implementing output measures, and most state library agencies will have these and other useful planning tools for loan.

Although library boards function as smoothly operating teams most of the time, there are some occasions when “problem” trustees disrupt the teamwork. The “problem” board member can be loudly domineering or the opposite—a person who has not spoken since introducing themselves at the first meeting two years ago. Even if the “problem” trustee is just a veteran member who should have retired, the board should have policies and procedures for removing the unproductive member.

For a board to be creative, articulate, and dynamic, its individuals need to have creative, articulate, and dynamic qualities. A clearly written rotation policy should be added to the board’s bylaws to weed out past-their-prime veterans when their terms expire. However, waiting for the domineering member’s term of service to end may take several agonizing years.

The board, after going through its evaluation process, could set objectives for individual members. At the end of the year, the board committee officers would then evaluate each member against these goals. Trustees not meeting the board goals can be asked to resign. This is a straightforward objective procedure that is based on standards all members have helped to formulate.

CONCLUSION

Of course, there are many other responsibilities and challenges for board members of rural libraries—assuring compliance with local, state, and federal laws; actively participating in regional continuing education

workshops and library conferences; joining state library associations; and keeping abreast of current library trends by regularly reading at least one library periodical are just a few.

There is a wealth of informative material available for rural library board members to use in their quest to provide the absolute best library service to their communities. The American Library Association in general, the Public Library Association, and the American Library Trustee Association have published dozens of appropriate books and pamphlets suitable for assisting board members in meeting the challenges of modern library information services. The American Library Association, unlike most professional membership associations, welcomes, and actively encourages, the participation and full membership of its trustees.

Almost every state library agency has published a public library trustees handbook of one kind or another in cooperation with their state library association's trustee association. A trustee's own state's handbook is the very first library document that should be read by a rural library board member. Two particularly noteworthy state titles are the Nebraska Library Commission's *Nebraska Trustees Handbook* (Robertson, 1990) and the Colorado State Library's *Leadership for Colorado Libraries: The Role of Trustees* (Bolt, 1985).

The books listed as references at the end of this article each have useful bibliographies leading to many more titles on the topics of libraries and trustees. The American Library Association, in addition to printed materials, has several videos suitable for rural trustees including the sixteen minute *Library Trustees: Meeting the Challenge* (ALA, 1988) which visually covers most of the subjects discussed in this article.

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Staffing Rural Public Libraries: The Need to Invest in Intellectual Capital

DANIEL D. BARRON

ABSTRACT

A WIDE RANGE OF PEOPLE are just beginning to equate information service in their communities with the institution they once believed served a primarily recreational and educational function—the public library. At present, many rural libraries have inadequate numbers of staff, and many others have staff which are seriously undereducated to meet the expanded information needs of the people in their communities.

If rural libraries are to seize the opportunities suggested by the developing positive view, develop services to support this view, and market such a view to a wider range of citizens in their communities, they must invest in the intellectual capital of their staffs. The benefits which technology promises for rural people to access information and education could also be the key for developing rural public library staff to provide those resources and services.

INTRODUCTION

Before ever considering the problems associated with staffing the rural public library, the question, Do we really need rural public libraries? should be answered. Vavrek (1993), whose insightful scholarship and unquestioned commitment to the profession and to rural people, forces this question to be considered. If current use equates need, according to his research, then perhaps we do not need public libraries in rural areas. On the other hand, if it is a matter of the institution called “library” simply not being perceived as an important information resource by rural

citizens, and that institution having the potential to be changed, nurtured, and adapted to meet more of the daily needs of real people, perhaps libraries are far more important than even Vavrek's obvious optimism would have us believe.

IMPORTANT LIBRARIES/CHANGING LIBRARIES

It may be merely optimistic and idealistic for individuals with a vested interest to hope for the continuation of the institution called "library," but there appears to be a goodly number of scholars and practitioners who affirm that libraries and librarians have a future. For example, in a recent report from the Committee on Applications and Technology, the writers conclude that: "Libraries are central to the success of the NII [National Information Infrastructure]" (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 1994, p. 99). This has the potential of being a powerful statement if those in the profession accept a leadership role in implementing it at the national and local levels. Reading only a few issues of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* will show a fairly secure future for academic libraries, which are described as essential to the application and implementation of the NII to learning and teaching in higher education. While they may be euphemistically labeled as "knowledge centers" or "information departments" in the literature of large business and industry, the organizational and service knowledge of librarians is critical to success in this arena as well. But what about small businesses, which account for nearly 70 percent of our tax base, which cannot afford libraries and library staff regardless of what term is used to describe them? What about people who cannot afford to own a computer or who lack the essential skills to make use of one? To some extent, the free net or community information network has been suggested as filling that gap. If one looks at the organizational structure of most of the successful free nets or community information networks, the public library holds a significant position organizationally and structurally.

From the more traditional perspective of providing books to readers, especially children and young people, the work of Krashen (1993) clearly indicates that the more kids read the better they will do academically in reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. Where else but libraries can parents get the full range of books to help their children to come to school ready to learn, and where can they turn to continue to reinforce these essential skills? Where else but the public library is there a central information service to support learning and decision making at all levels?

D'Elia and Rodger (1994) conclude that: "[t]here appear to be three fundamental roles of the library in the community: educational support, provision of information, and recreation" (p. 136). Although this study was completed in large urban areas, the transfer value should be considered for rural public libraries as well.

A future with public libraries as institutions which are central to the success of the NII, central for preschool and lifelong learning, and central to the success of the citizens in the communities they serve requires a radical change in both the services libraries can provide and the perceptions of citizens toward those libraries. To do so, "the library must change from a fortress to a pipeline" (Dowlin, 1993, p. 37) and be seen as a service rather than a place (Vavrek, 1993, p. 10). Or, as Penniman (1993) says: "It is clear that libraries must be viewed, first and foremost, as information delivery systems, not warehouses" (p. 10). To make these changes in service, use, perception, and appreciation, rural public libraries—perhaps all public libraries—need help.

CHANGING LIBRARIES/STAFFING NEEDS

Whatever the future of the rural public library, the burden of survival and growth is laid firmly upon the shoulders of the staff of those libraries. While this may appear to be "blaming the victim" given the political nature of public library funding, or the lack of funding, the local staff will be the deciding factor in the death or glory of rural public libraries.

A review of the literature from the past ten years shows a fairly consistent pattern of concerns and issues about staffing. Articles on staff evaluation, staff participation in planning, and staffing patterns frequently occur, however, the vast majority of such articles focus on larger urban libraries. In articles devoted to rural library staff, most writers point to concerns and problems which can be traced almost always to staff education. Marketing, services to special populations, technology, and recruitment all can be crystallized under the heading of "educational needs." How to effectively incorporate the time of volunteers, day care for staff children, and benefits package selection have all been discussed, but education, sometimes referred to as training, is the single most common thread which may be found in the literature treating rural library staffing.

Traditionally, many rural public libraries owe their beginnings to the good will and community spirit of citizens who practically donated their time to the daily operations of the library. Personal observation over the past twenty years and anecdotal records in the literature can paint glowing pictures of the dedication and love of community many library staff members have who work with rural populations. But, today, only 54 percent of librarians and 19 percent of staff in libraries serving communities considered to be rural (i.e., 25,000 people or fewer) have an ALA-MLS (Chute, 1994, p. 29). How can a staff with such an educational deficit be expected to accomplish all that will be demanded to enable their libraries to go beyond being a warehouse of popular reading materials? How can we expect them to "change from pointers and retrievers to organizers and facilitators" (Dowlin, 1993, p. 36)? As Vavrek (1993) points out:

"The education/training deficiency is so enormous and present methods are so inadequate that they can not possibly cope with future challenges as currently configured" (p. 27). Ford (1994) continues this theme with:

The reality too often is inadequate local collections, minimally trained rural librarians, and a cumbersome delivery system. It should be no surprise that rural residents' expectations of the library as a source of daily information are usually much lower than their needs. (p. 34)

Childers (1994) offers his suggestions for meeting the current "reference crisis" in California when he writes in a section of his article: "Larger than local solutions....Train, train, train" (p. 35). While he may be speaking of public libraries in general, the rural public library certainly exists in California.

Among the characteristics Ford (1994) lists, "that will distinguish those rural public libraries which successfully provide 21st century reference service" is training for library boards and staff. Both groups must "obtain the training and continuing education that enable them to understand, plan for, and use new technologies and ways of providing library service. Training and experience in planning and managing change are also critical for those involved with libraries" (p. 40).

In a study of library directors and educators to determine the primary issues and concerns they believed to be most critical to the profession, Greiner (1994) found that "technological advances" rose to the top (p. 204). Couple her findings with those suggested by just considering the titles of the articles included in this journal, and there is little room to doubt that education must be among the top, if not the top, staffing concern the profession must face smartly and squarely.

STAFFING NEEDS=LEARNING COMMUNITY

While the author agrees with Childers's concept, the difference between training and education must be carefully articulated if rural staffs are to enjoy a future of problem solving and decision making for themselves and their communities. This difference is well articulated in a *Fortune* magazine article by Stewart (1994): "Your Company's Most Valuable Asset: Intellectual Capital." Training is an old Winslow Taylor educationistic school solution which must be quickly forgotten for all levels of the work force if we are to take full advantage of those who represent the company's future. In the case of rural public libraries, the work force will include a wide range of educational levels, yet each person must be seen as having the potential of going beyond the automaton concept of merely following patterns to that of an "intrapreneur." As Peters (1994) says: "Becoming a member of a community of practice is literally a requirement of

modern-day job success" (p. 174). He quotes Stucky of the Institute for Research on Learning, "Learning is the process of becoming a member of a community of practice. The motivation to learn is the motivation to become a member" (Stucky quoted in Peters, 1994, p. 174).

As we make justifiable distinctions between and among the various educational levels in our profession, it is essential that we concentrate our efforts to make each library a learning community. For nearly 50 percent of our rural public libraries that should include helping the directors to obtain the MLS and helping them provide their staffs with regular programs of education which may or may not be degree related but will match the needs of the libraries and the communities.

A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO THE EDUCATION DILEMMA: THE VIRTUAL CAMPUS

Encouraging the development of learning communities requires more than providing the staff with a workshop or two and asking that they read Senge (1990). Rather, it requires an initial investment with ongoing nurturing which one library, one regional library system, or even one state library system cannot meet independently. Continuing education has also been delegated to professional associations through their journals, conferences, and workshops. While this will remain an essential component of the profession's continued renewal, it cannot be expected solely to meet the educational demands of current and future rural public library staffs.

Dowlin (1993) issues a challenge to library schools "to provide a systemic, integrated curriculum to the beginner, to provide the programs for the architects of the library of the future, and to create a lifelong learning environment" (p. 37). If we expect the current configuration of "library schools" to meet independently the needs of library and information providers, we are expecting the impossible. Assuming that each "library school" has a commitment to all types of libraries and information service agencies, they are just not geographically located nor staffed at levels which could logically be expected to successfully meet Dowlin's challenge, even within the limited area they currently serve.

One solution which could pull local libraries, state library agencies, professional associations, and programs of library and information science education together to commemoratively meet the challenge of initial and continuing education is to create a virtual campus for library and information studies through distance education.

DISTANCE EDUCATION: CREATING THE VIRTUAL CAMPUS

The virtual classroom has been a reality for many years as telecommunications technology has made it possible for the teacher and learner to share an experience similar to that of a traditional classroom. As the

technology has changed and provided for a broader range of opportunities for interaction, the debate as to just what constitutes distance education has smoldered and often flared up in debates.

Educators have seized the opportunities provided by each communications revolution from the use of roads to extend the campuses of Oxford and Cambridge in the 1850s to the use of the mail systems in the late 1800s and early 1900s to provide correspondence study in a wide range of disciplines and for a wide diversity of populations. Telephones, radio, and television were hardly weaned from their developers before women and men, whose vision of society's needs and commitment to those people not able to attend the traditional campus, applied these new systems to education (Barron, 1993).

Critics have often questioned the legitimacy of correspondence study for its seemingly impersonal and nondirect interaction of teacher and student. As the various telecommunications systems have been put into use, they have contended that distance education is simply a euphemism for an electronic version of correspondence study. Even live and interactive television classes have been characterized as little more than "talking heads." Those using television have countered with, "What's the difference between a talking head and a stalking head?" alluding to the fact that much of what the critics contend as being underactive teacher/student interaction is hardly more than a teacher-centered, front of the room, presentation with teacher talking and learners listening.

Such arguments are not very productive because, as is in most cases, each party's assault is somewhat correct. However, a revolution is taking place across the spectrum of education. This revolution is one in which the focus is placed on the learner and not the teacher. The words *collaborative* and *cooperative* are used to characterize learning in which the student is an active participant in every aspect of the learning/teaching partnership. Some have suggested that the role of the teacher has changed from that of "Sage on the Stage" to "Guide on the Side."

In the past, each new technology or each new "teaching system" was touted as *the* way to teach better, when in fact, most were merely changing the package but approaching the teaching/learning relationship very much the same as that practiced conventionally. Thomas Edison once said that the moving picture would replace books in teaching, yet books remain one of the most important resources in education. It has been predicted that programmed instruction would replace the lecture and provide independence for learners. Lectures and face-to-face instruction remain very valuable techniques for certain learning/teaching activities.

Television was heralded as the best way to let master teachers teach the masses, perhaps even replace teachers in certain areas. Today we know that television can supplement and be integrated into the work of master

teachers, but it cannot replace them. The power of computers to revolutionize education has most often gone into drill and practice programs aimed at the lowest levels of rote learning.

The current revolution has a more holistic approach to the teaching/learning relationship. Just as Newton's Laws remain as valid in the age of quarks and chaos as they were when he first proposed them, new techniques and technologies are being accommodated into the full range of approaches to quality education. The traditional classroom is quickly becoming less and less "traditional" as converging and complementary technologies are being used by educators using converging and complementary techniques.

This revolution is more easily comprehended by those who have been involved with distance education than by those who have not become as actively involved with the new and emerging technologies and their applications to education. An example of converging technologies is a "televised" class which depends not just on cameras and cable, but on computers, satellites, telephone systems, and fiber optics to provide a learning/teaching opportunity. Complementary technologies are those which should be in place to support the entire learning/teaching process. For example, a class session may depend upon a live interactive teacher-centered presentation with discussion. This one session must be examined within the context of pre-class and post-class activities which may be illustrated by the following scenario: The teacher designs a course (for academic credit or continuing inservice education) based on the anticipated needs of the learners. She or he determines what initial readings, books, video programs, or other preclass preparations are needed. Some of these materials may be made available through a textbook, book of readings, television broadcasting system, gopher or other computer system-based information retrieval system, or from a local library or a virtual library. During the class, the teacher may lecture and use a full range of visuals including videotapes, still pictures, computer generated graphics, or hand-written notes. Learners may be asked to cluster in small groups to discuss the various ideas presented by the preclass preparation and in-class presentation, proctor each other in comprehension quizzes, or complete journals and study guide outlines. As a full group, the class may discuss the topics raised in the small group discussions, exchange questions and answers related to course content or processes related to follow-up or assignments through two-way audio or two-way audio and video technologies. After class, the learners may cluster locally in small groups to complete assignments or discuss issues related to the course. They might participate in listserv discussions with other learners who may be in the class or with members of the professional or discipline-centered community. They may explore the rich resources online related to the topics of the

course or class via the Internet, locally through community information systems, or nationally and internationally. They may send drafts of assignments to the teacher or each other by way of e-mail, fax, or snail mail as they accept mutual responsibility for learning. They may also go into virtual libraries for citations, full texts of documents, or to request books and other resources to be sent to them via e-mail or snail mail. Final exams may be distributed and proctored in real time by instructors, and projects jointly critiqued by the teacher, learners, or outside experts. Learners may attend related lectures, teleconferences, and demonstrations by way of television, compressed video, or online discussion.

This scenario will quickly become archaic as the various technologies are made more readily available, affordable, and acceptable, and as educators experiment with and adapt these technologies to the ways people learn best. However, the scenario represents an educational experience which is possible now and whose components have been tested and validated in a wide range of situations and with a wide range of learners. It is now up to educators in all disciplines to put the various pieces together for their particular communities.

A number of library and information studies programs have responded to some educational needs using many of the elements described in the scenario above, yet less than 20 percent are using any type of distance education (Barron & Sykes, 1994). In a recent survey of state library agencies, the author found that, although only ten currently provide continuing education for their public libraries through telecommunications technology, all but one indicated that they would like to be able to do so and would take advantage of quality education delivered via such technologies (Barron, 1994). The Library and Information Science Distance Education Consortium (LISDEC), which began as a service to provide graduate credit courses, refocused its mission to include continuing education for all levels of staff and moved graduate credit courses to the background. In 1993-1994, LISDEC provided four teleconferences primarily for school library media specialists, and projects five additional teleconferences for 1994-1995. A few professional associations and consortia have produced teleconferences, yet no systematic plan has been provided to assure ongoing activities in these areas.

CONCLUSION

Vavrek (1993), in a rare moment of pessimism, asks a concluding question in his study: "Is it possible, that in addition to all of the challenges facing the future of library services, that effective solutions are being denied because of a lack of confidence about the importance of libraries from within the ranks of librarians? Wow" (p. 38)! Wow, indeed!

Is it possible that we are perpetuating this lack of confidence through a failure to reach into the lives of current rural public library staff with appropriate, affordable, and accessible education? Tehranian (1990) speaks eloquently about the importance of the use of technology to reach into the lives of people in developing countries:

the synergistic effects of information also present a challenge to the more developed countries to share their scientific and technological know-how with the less developed world. A more informed, developed, and equitable world will be a more peaceful world. The challenge before us is, therefore, not so much to foresee as to empower" (p. 18).

If we substitute the concept of rural libraries for that of developing nations, do we not have a similar obligation to the people in our own country? If we do not reach out with every available technology, are we not denying rural public library staff, and, just as critical, the communities they serve, access to information and education which are the basis for economic development, cultural maintenance, and personal satisfaction? It seems that the needs are obvious, the systems are in place, and the potential promising for the profession to invest in the single most important aspect of its future in the intellectual capital of its members.

NOTE

1 See for example:

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM:

- American Center for the Study of Distance Education, Penn State University, 403 South Allen Street, Suite 206, State College, PA 16801-5202). Supports the online discussion group, DEOS-L. Join with a message to LISTSERV@PUSVM.PSU.EDU (message: Subscribe DEOS-L firstname lastname).
- Institute for Distance Learning. The University of the State of New York, Regents College, 7 Columbia Circle, Albany, New York 12203. 518/464-8765.
- Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education, National School Boards Association, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. 703/838-6722.
- International Centre for Distance Learning at the UK Open University database is open for free access. Telnet to [acsvox.open.ac.uk](telnet://acsvox.open.ac.uk). At the welcome message, login to the Open University VAX cluster with the Username: icdl. We would then like you to access the database using your country name as the account code. Please enter this without any spaces. The password is then just AAA. If you have any difficulty or want to comment, please send e-mail to n.ismail@open.ac.uk or l.r.a.melton@open.ac.uk. The Open University can also be reached via: Janet number 000041500030, EuropaNET

204334504891, Geonet da 23428440015630 or OU-VAX Library and Information Science Distance Education Consortium (LISDEC), Dan Barron, Coordinator, College of Library and Information Science, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC 29208. 803/777-4825, fax: 803/777-7938 or e-mail <Dan.Barron@SCarolina.Edu>.

National Distance Learning Center: Owensboro Community College, 4800 New Hartford Road, Owensboro, KY 42303. 502/686-4558.

Across Towns and Across Times: Library Service to Young People in Rural Libraries

RISTIINA WIGG

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES LIBRARY SERVICE to young people in rural libraries in New York State with reference to services provided by rural libraries and librarians in other parts of the nation. The article addresses the efforts of rural libraries to meet the information needs of children and young adults. It explores the alignment of library programs with national concerns such as literacy and learning readiness. It also examines ways in which the characteristics of rural libraries affect traditional programs for youth. This article reviews methods of effective and innovative delivery of services; approaches to collection development and multicultural literature; use of computers, planning, and standards; as well as work with preschoolers, students, schools, and summer reading clubs.

INTRODUCTION

Rural library directors, often working part-time, have to be experts in everything. They may be the only staff member but, even with additional staff, the director has to know the adult as well as the children's collection, be able to recommend a good mystery, help students research topics, choose picture books for story time, publicize the library, work with elected officials, and raise funds. In many rural libraries, the director is responsible for all services to children. Even when a staff member is available to plan and conduct programs for children, the library director often selects the books and decides which additional formats the library will provide for children.

Library service to children is a major focus in many rural libraries. The Beekman Library, located in New York State's Hudson Valley, is a good example. Every child who enters the library gets a sticker. If there is time after story hour, children are allowed to stamp their hands with a rubber stamp from the stamp collection behind the circulation desk. There are toys and puppets for their use in the library and videocassettes, music audiotapes, and books on tape, as well as picture books, and fiction and nonfiction titles to check out.

Story hours, summer reading programs, and special events for children take up a large portion of Director Lee Eaton's thirty-hour week. She oversees adult volunteers who conduct programs, encourages teenage volunteers, and conducts some of the programs herself. In return, families make heavy use of the library. The circulation of children's materials constitutes 33 percent of the total circulation. In a 1,700 square foot building with total holdings of 14,244 items, creative arrangement of space allows for a small section of young adult titles, but there is not enough room for a toddler program. Beekman's long-range plan does not specifically address service to young people, but Eaton would eventually like to have a young adult room with computers as well as a much enlarged children's room, also with computers. Hiring a children's librarian would enable the library to offer much more to families and to focus on children's programs, with a story time every day (L. Eaton, personal communication, December 9, 1994).

Regardless of how much Eaton and other library directors enjoy children's work and value getting to know children and their families, if rural library directors across the country could have one wish, it could well be, "Send me a children's librarian. Send me a staffer to conduct story times, select books, answer questions, plan and conduct the summer reading program, and plan children's services. There is not time to do what needs to be done for children."

A national advertisement for children's librarians needed to work in rural libraries in every state might read:

Librarians Needed for Service to Children

Work in a rural community. Build a collection of quality materials. Select and provide culturally diverse materials. Work with preschoolers. Assist students. Work with schools. Conduct summer reading clubs. Be computer literate. Find time for planning. Incorporate standards.

The qualifications and skills stated in this hypothetical ad identify the many needs and challenges of rural libraries and rural librarianship. This discussion will examine library service to young people in rural libraries in New York State with reference to services provided by rural libraries and librarians in other parts of the nation.

WORK IN A RURAL COMMUNITY

Rural communities exist in every state and have made a major contribution to American society. As Stern (1994) explains: "Since the 1920s, and especially after World War II, millions of Americans born in rural areas have migrated to urban centers, directing their intelligence and energy to build the nation's cities, factories, and offices and to construct communication and transportation arteries. Their investment in the nation's strength and fortune is incalculable" (p. 1).

What is a rural community and how is it defined? An answer is provided by Stern (1994): "two sets of definitions are commonly used to analyze rural situations—one determined by *place* [a settlement with a population smaller than 2,500 or population density less than 1,000 residents per square mile] and one by *county*. The categories overlap so both urban and rural places may be found within both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties" (p. 13).

While some states which are thought of as mainly urban/suburban may have large numbers of rural residents, other large states thought of as rural may have the majority of their population concentrated in metropolitan areas. The following are characteristics of schools in rural areas as summarized by Stern (1994) in the U. S. Department of Education publication, *The Condition of Education in Rural Schools* :

- economic diversity among rural residents, with significant levels of poverty
- greater percentage of income spent for schooling
- limited fiscal resources
- teachers and principals in rural schools generally younger and less well-educated than nonrural peers
- student performance approximating the national mean
- isolation
- less opportunity for higher education. (p. 3)

Public services cost more per capita and are more difficult to deliver to smaller numbers of people spread over larger areas. At the same time, small schools offer students increased opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities and the opportunity to receive greater personal attention. Stern (1994) concludes, "student achievement in small schools equaled or exceeded that of students in large schools, suggesting that the climate in small schools may propel students to excel in spite of certain material disadvantages" (p. 57). Factors which affect students of rural schools also affect the public library services they receive. Just as the geographic isolation and inadequate budgets of rural schools result in fewer highly trained teachers, the same factors result in a smaller number of trained library directors working in rural libraries.

Lynch and Lance (1993) list eleven states in which more than 80 percent of public libraries reported no librarians with a Master's degree in library science. Children's librarians are fewer still. In a telephone conversation with Gaye Walters, children's consultant, Montana State Library, she reported that there are only six professional children's librarians in Montana (G. Walters, personal communication, September 30, 1994). New York State is characterized by a large urban/suburban population and by vast sparsely settled areas served by small public libraries. Over half of New York's 741 chartered public libraries serve populations with fewer than 5,000 people. Approximately 462 (62 percent) of the public libraries in New York State serve a population of fewer than 7,500. Of those, almost 90 percent report no librarians with a Master's degree in library science. No statistics exist for the number of children's librarians in rural New York State.

With limited time and many services to provide, most library directors must plunge into providing service to young people by figuring out how to buy books and conduct story times. Adequate library planning would ensure that services meet the needs of residents, connect young people to the wider world, make the best use of limited funds and staff time, and build a strong base of community support for the library if it was not all too often one of the last activities to be addressed.

FIND TIME FOR PLANNING

Planning is always difficult and is especially challenging for rural libraries. In an article describing a survey on role setting and planning for rural libraries, Vavrek (1989) concludes:

librarians in small and medium sized institutions are simply not planning for future library services. The mitigating, but not complete answer is that staff members are too busy delivering services. How much is to be expected of the one-person library manager... (p. 94)?

Without planning, local surveying, etc., the public library becomes an extension of the librarian's views rather than those of the community....

[N]ational library associations, and particularly those at the state level could have a profound effect by making planning, and its collateral aspects, as a sustaining goal. One of the weaknesses of American librarianship is that we fail to plan. . . . It should not be surprising that symptoms of the same deficiencies are seen throughout the countryside. (p. 95)

Planning consists of matching the needs of the community with library services. Knowing the community is the key to deciding which services will meet the needs of young people and how best to deliver these services. The community's general geographic, demographic, and economic factors have an effect on rural library services to children. The librarian must determine which factors are more important and precisely how they are to be weighted in the planning process.

The first step in planning is to look at community demographics and find the answers to questions such as: How many residents live in the library's service area? What proportion of children is under five years old? What proportion is under fourteen years of age? What is the library's annual budget? How much is spent on materials and programs for children and young adults? What percentage of the circulation is children's materials? Is there a school in town? Are there Head Start services? Do adults work in fields, farms, forests, factories, mines, or offices? Is the community within easy driving distance of a small city? Are there many latchkey children? Are families poor or well-off or both?

Susan Hill, a consultant in the Northwest Library District (serving twenty counties in northwest Ohio), addresses the importance of knowing how many low-income families are in the library's service area. In addition to census data, Hill suggests informal methods of observation which raise awareness of low-income families who might otherwise be invisible in the community. How many families are living in low-cost housing along the roadside or in trailer parks? What is the literacy level in the community? Are there many parents who do not read well (S. Hill, personal communication, December 6, 1994)?

Ruth Anne Mears (1989), extension agent, Family Living Program, Cooperative Extension Service, Clarion County, Pennsylvania, underscores the importance of recognizing the needs of low-income families:

Rural America has poverty, isolation, inadequate services and inequality. Thus, when problems do exist, they can remain hidden and private. Clarion County [PA] has many families living in cars or tents, but not many residents even know this exists. Because of the isolation, poverty, and lack of services, the need for information is great. . . . As providers of information to rural areas it is important that we understand what families are like. (p. 41)

Mears (1989) also emphasizes the difference between the information needs and wants of rural families and the importance of understanding their values in order to provide families with the information they need: "identifying needs may be the easy part; while making the delivery, reaching the people who need information, and helping them use information are the hard parts. Perhaps, first we need to examine the existing values and determine ways goals can be reach[ed] within the values or work to change the values" (p. 39).

Hill echoes these ideas in a concise description of the purpose of a rural library and the data needed as the basis for developing a viable service plan. She makes explicit the connection between gathering information and planning:

The purpose of a library is to serve the needs of a community or service area through a collection of materials organized for accessibility and programs and services targeting specific patron groups. Without knowledge of "who" lives in a community, the library is unable to adequately plan programs and services.

Community analysis is the key to effective collection development and library service. The more you know about the interests, education levels, values, and other characteristics of potential library users, the more likely it is that the library will be able to provide the information and services desired by the community it serves. (S. Hill, personal communication, December 6, 1994)

The librarian needs to collect and analyze community information and develop a library plan that meets the needs of the entire community. McClure et al. (1987) suggest a list of eight roles that may be used as a starting point. These include: community activities center, community information center, formal education support center, independent learning center, popular materials library, preschoolers' door to learning, reference library, research center (p. 28). The library should select two or three specific roles as the basis for a service plan that meets the needs of the community.

A library's service plan should not only integrate children's services but also demonstrate specific roles for meeting children's needs. Vavrek (1989) conducted a survey to ascertain the impressions of rural librarians in establishing roles for their libraries. Vavrek found high levels of agreement related to services to young people. There was, for example, 94 percent agreement among the librarians with the statement: "My library assists elementary and secondary students in meeting educational objectives established during formal courses of study. . ." (p. 87). Another 99 percent agreed that their library, "encourages young children to develop an interest in reading." Also, 96 percent agreed with the statement: "My library provides parents and other adult care-givers with materials on reading for children" (p. 88).

Slightly more than 75 percent of those responding to the survey indicated their agreement with the statement that a function of the library is "cooperating with child care agencies in the community on an ongoing basis" (p. 88).

Almost 75 percent of the rural libraries surveyed provide specialized services in the library such as story hours for children, literacy programs, and meeting rooms (p. 87). Naylor (1987) identified specific library services to children that key children's library professionals around the country reported as "traditional." These include:

- story hours
- preschool story hours
- reference and reader's advisory service
- summer reading clubs
- a quality book collection (p. 384).

INCORPORATE STANDARDS

While planning for library service is based on the needs of individual communities, library standards can provide measures to evaluate communities' needs for services and can serve as benchmarks. The

relationship between planning and standards was highlighted by the Standards Revision Committee of the Youth Services Section/New York Library Association (1994) in the very first statement of its standards document, each library, regardless of size, requires:

- information to help design services for its community
- assistance in the endless struggle for better funding
- measures to evaluate its performance
- tools to analyze and solve its problems. (p. 1)

Nancy Rubery, chair, Standards Revision Committee, reports that the committee wrestled with the question: "Are we being sensitive enough to the needs of small libraries? The standards are very valid and relevant. The first step for any library going through the planning process is to plan responsibly. If library staff do not know the community and (fail to) plan library services accordingly, they cannot serve their communities. The Standards are a tool" (N. Rubery, personal communication, November 7, 1994).

Using standards as a tool requires that measurement and evaluation of existing library services be included as part of the planning process. Walter (1992) presents standardized procedures for use in measuring a library's effectiveness in reaching young people. Bracy (1993) discusses the use of output measures and the responsibility of youth librarians to use measures as part of planning. Franklin and Hamil (1992) describe the process used by the youth services librarians in a small suburban library to evaluate service to young people. Rural librarians would benefit from guidelines, publications, and journal articles discussing ways in which methods for evaluating youth services may be adapted for use in one-person libraries.

BUILD A COLLECTION OF QUALITY MATERIALS

"The foundations from which children's services are created are carefully selected materials..." (New York Library Association, 1994, p. 17). Working with a limited budget and with the goal of meeting a particular library's unique needs, the rural librarian must invest careful thought in the purchase of materials which will best fill the roles selected for the library's service plan.

A tiny rural library cannot afford to let its collection become stagnant. It is a lifeline to the wonderful world of literature, for readers of all ages. And, in this time of "format neutral" collection development, I should rephrase that and say...the rural library is a lifeline to the world!...libraries...will become the connect point to Internet, and they are already the source of all sorts of data via interlibrary loan, wonderful CDs, videos.... (N. Rubery, FAX communication with author, November 7, 1994)

While discussions with rural librarians indicate that books are the most important component of the collection provided to children, some libraries also provide other formats—e.g., videotapes, book/cassette sets, and CD-ROMs.

Some of the questions that may arise during the selection process include: whether to purchase a print encyclopedia or a CD-ROM version? How many picture books? What percentage of fiction or nonfiction books for elementary school students? Paperbacks or hardcover titles for young adults? Low-reading-level materials as well as advanced materials for gifted students? These questions are even more difficult to answer when many rural library staffs may lack in-depth knowledge of children's literature and the developmental needs of children, or lack access to journals reviewing the literature.

Answers to these questions may assume the form of different kinds of services and varying approaches to collection development. Recognizing the importance of collection development, Grace Greene, Vermont Children's Services consultant, participates several times a year in day-long book review sessions that review or display approximately 300 books. The Washington State Library includes a course in children's literature in its continuing education program for directors of rural libraries. Many of the public library systems in New York State regularly publish annotated lists that help librarians decide which materials to purchase. However, such selection and assistance for nonprint formats is less readily available. More help is needed to build the multimedia collections for rural children which will transcend existing boundaries and open vast new worlds of information and literature.

SELECT AND PROVIDE CULTURALLY DIVERSE MATERIALS

Children living in rural communities comprised of homogeneous populations lack contact with people of other backgrounds. These children will be especially affected if librarians do not make multicultural materials available and encourage children to read books about children from other cultures.

Miller-Lachmann (1993) states: "As librarians, we make assumptions about who will read what, and one of our most destructive assumptions is that white teenagers won't read about people of color unless the story is presented in the most universal of terms. As a result of this type of thinking, we have a nation of people who know very little about each other" (p. 164).

Librarians need to integrate songs, rhymes, folktales, stories, and biographies which illustrate the richness of the world into library collections and programs. In a speech, Harrington (1993) spoke passionately, saying: "Children's librarians need to take leadership....For us, cultural

diversity is day-to-day library business. It does not depend on the size of our collections, the size of our staffs, or the size of our budgets. It depends on the size of our commitments" (p. 176).

Opening new access routes to insight, imagination, and diversity includes providing materials that portray a multitude of cultures and wide-ranging ideas. Harrington (1993) emphasizes the need to help children "develop an affirming understanding of other cultures and to appreciate their own heritage" (p. 176).

Kruse (1992) defines multicultural literature as books by and about people of color and divides such literature into three types. The first type includes books by authors like Shirley Hughes¹ and Vera B. Williams,² which include characters of various ethnic backgrounds going about their daily activities. The second type—written by authors of one race or culture about people of another race or culture—includes books like *Abuela* by Arthur Dorros³ or the controversial *The Education of Little Tree* by Forrest Carter.⁴ A third type are books written about ethnic or cultural groups by members of that group. Virginia Hamilton⁵ successfully incorporates African-American life and values into fiction; Laurence Yep⁶ bases many anecdotes in his young-adult fiction on episodes from his own childhood (Kruse, 1992, pp. 30-32).

Kruse (1992) also discusses the importance of including all types of multicultural literature in the library in order to dispel myths, establish the value of diversity, and provide children with information about, and validation of, their own culture.

There is no single season for multicultural literature. Books about American Indians are books for all times, not only Thanksgiving. Books about African and African-American themes and topics are books for all bibliographies, displays and readers' advisory opportunities. Books about Latinos are books for all children. Books about Asians and Asian-Americans are books for everyone, not only for new immigrant families or recent refugees or white parents with Asian family members. (pp. 33, 122)

Librarians in rural communities have a unique opportunity to help rural youth travel beyond the isolation of their communities. Librarians need to consult available information on providing balanced multicultural collections that will expose youth to multicultural experiences beyond their community.

WORK WITH PRESCHOOLERS

Wiggly, curious, noisy preschoolers are among the most consistent recipients of public library resources. Parents, looking for educational activities to get their children off to a good start, find that libraries are the only community institution that has a free collection of materials tailor made for preschoolers for use either in the library or at home.

A collection for preschoolers may include simply written board and picture books just right for babies and toddlers, classic story books that parents remember from their own childhood, and new nonfiction dramatically illustrated with photographs on a wide variety of appealing subjects. Some libraries may include toys—to use in the library or to check out—videocassettes, or audiocassettes, but books are the mainstay.

In rural communities, the public library provides preschoolers with an opportunity for social interaction. With few commercial providers of gymnastic activities or classes for “mommy and me,” the library may be the only place that includes preschoolers. When homes are far apart, preschool children have little chance to meet other children. At the library and during story times, children have an opportunity to develop social skills by interacting with other preschoolers.

The importance of the public library to the development of preschoolers directly supports the first of the National Goals for Education: “By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (ALA, 1991). In 1990, President George Bush, in his second State of the Union message, announced six ambitious goals for the nation’s schools. These priorities were quickly and unanimously endorsed by the governors from all fifty states. President Bill Clinton continues to support these six goals. Several divisions of the American Library Association prepared a paper on “Implementing the National Goals for Education through Library Services” as a companion to the American Association of School Librarians’ statement on “Implementing the National Goals for Education Through School Library Media Programs.”

ALA sent both responses to the national goals to the 1991 Second White House Conference on Library and Information Services attendees. The ALA paper outlines the services that libraries provide in support of the National Goals. Library services that support the first National Education Goal include:

- Programs for toddlers and preschoolers
- A positive environment for developing the social skills needed in formal education
- Support and materials for parents and adult caregivers
- Literacy programs for parents
- Help for parents in preparing their children for reading.

Boyer (1993) emphasizes the value of language in the learning process:

Lewis Thomas wrote on one occasion that childhood is for language. It’s in the first years of life that children are curious about language and become empowered in the use of words. It’s absolutely ludicrous to expect children to be “ready to learn” if they grow up in an environment that is linguistically impoverished or if they fail to get thoughtful responses to their questions. I’m suggesting that parents are the first and most essential teachers, and this means helping their children discover the miracle and the majesty of words. (p. 55)

Boyer, speaking as the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, discussed the Carnegie report on school readiness, including a proposal for helping children enter school "ready to learn." One of the proposals emphasized the need for community resources to promote learning. The report called for libraries, museums, and zoos to establish school readiness programs for preschoolers and for shopping malls to have centers where children can play and learn (p. 55).

In rural communities, libraries often provide the only public space and collection of learning materials available for preschool children and the adults who care for them. What are some of these learning materials? Books like Bruce MacMillan's⁷ *Counting Wildflowers* and Donald Crews's⁸ *The Bicycle Race*—which introduce mathematical concepts such as recognizing numerals and whole number operations—help parents to weave mathematics into everyday life. Books like *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney⁹ and Eric Carle's¹⁰ *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* make the natural world come alive for young children. Titles like *Madeline* by Ludwig Bemelmans¹¹ and *Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown¹² demonstrate the "majesty of words."

The federally funded Head Start program provides enrichment and learning experiences to preschool children in low-income families in many rural communities. The Library-Head Start Partnership Project is currently administered through a joint agreement between the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the Head Start Bureau of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Association for Library Services to Children, an ALA division. The project is designed to demonstrate how libraries can work with Head Start agencies to strengthen children's learning and parent involvement in children's literacy and language development. The videotape, *The Library-Head Start Partnership* (Center for the Book, 1993), presents information about the project. The video discusses the scope of the potential relationship between local libraries and Head Start agencies; a variety of library program formats and techniques, such as reading aloud, puppets, dramatic play; criteria for deciding what makes a good book; and a discussion of the potential for library staff and materials to enhance the education of children, help parents educate their children, and link library resources to all Head Start activities.

In Vermont, where isolated rural families receive Head Start services in their homes rather than attending a central Head Start program, librarians need to develop different ways to cooperate with and supplement Head Start programs. Vermont librarians are just starting to work with Head Start agencies. In the spring of 1995, the Vermont Library Conference will include a workshop on Head Start and parent involvement. The State Library received a grant to assemble story hour packets to circulate to Head Start home visitors (G. Greene, personal communication, November 18, 1994).

"Beginning with Mother Goose" is an existing Vermont program that connects parents and caregivers to library resources and literature for preschoolers. Grace Greene, Children's Services consultant, Vermont Department of Libraries, worked with colleagues from the Vermont Center for the Book, the Department of Education, the Vermont Council on the Humanities, and an independent consultant to create the original "Beginning with Mother Goose" program. The program was so successful that the team developed a second series, "Growing with Mother Goose," for parents of children ages three to five. Now, a third program, "Mother Goose Asks Why?" introduces picture books that parents can use to teach science concepts to preschoolers (G. Greene, personal communication, November 18, 1994).

"Beginning with Mother Goose," a three-part series, presents parents with information about excellent books that are attractive and developmentally appropriate. The series also offers information on the why and how of reading to babies and toddlers. Parents of children from birth to three years of age are given eleven books and, during the sessions, discuss the titles, learn about songs, fingerplays, information on how to select books appropriate for each developmental stage, and what makes a book effective. Sharon Bartram, director of the Brown Library, Vermont, which serves a population of 5,600, reports that the programs were so well-received that there was not enough room for all the families who wanted to attend (S. Bartram, personal communication, November 22, 1994).

Professionals have been trained to lead the Mother Goose programs. The programs have been presented to day care providers, teen parents, parents of children in remedial education programs, and Head Start parents. Groups as varied as the Department of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and private foundations provide funding. The National Science Foundation awarded a grant for over \$500,000 to the Vermont Center for the Book to organize the three-year program series of "Mother Goose Asks Why?"

Whether programs are held in libraries, schools, or parent/child centers, a basic component is the link between the public library and the participants. This link is especially important in rural communities where public libraries are often the only source of materials that can help start the youngest children on the path to lifelong learning.

Concern about literacy in rural communities has attracted national sponsors for a project in rural libraries administered by the American Library Association. A December 1994 American Library Association (1994a) press release, "\$3,000 awarded for second Viburnum/ALA Rural Family Literacy Project grants," describes a three-year program to develop or enhance family literacy programs. During the third year, beginning September 1994, six public libraries in rural Louisiana are receiving \$3,000 grants. The project joins librarians with education and literacy specialists to improve the reading skills of families. A "literacy team," which

includes the librarian, Head Start coordinator, and school board members, attends a training seminar in order to learn creative strategies for developing library based family literacy programs and providing reading assistance for parents who do not read well.

A second family literacy project administered by the American Library Association (1994b) uses funds granted by Cargill to donate small family literacy collections to each of 250 local partnerships established since 1992. Collection sites include libraries, schools, and other sites participating in literacy partnerships in small towns, farm communities, and urban areas nationwide.

ASSIST STUDENTS

"And how!" states a librarian responding to a survey of rural librarians conducted by Vavrek (1989) which found 94 percent agreement with the statement: "My library assists elementary and secondary students in meeting educational objectives established during formal courses of study..." (p. 87).

Reference and reader's advisory service may be the service most clearly connected in the public mind with libraries. D'Elia and Rodger (1994) report on surveys of library users conducted by three large urban libraries. They conclude that the users surveyed appear to value three fundamental roles of the library in the community: (1) educational support; (2) provision of information; and (3) recreation (p. 143).

A survey of young rural library patrons might show similar results. Librarians develop numerous programs to provide educational support and information to young people. For example, what has made homework easier and more fun in five rural New York libraries? The use of multimedia computers. "BLAST—Books, Libraries, and Students Team-up"—a federal Library Services and Construction Act Homework Center Grant awarded to the Mohawk Valley Library Association (NY), provided the funds to establish up to five pilot rural library homework centers designed for youth in grades four through eight. The centers were equipped with multimedia computers, computerized information resources, and one-on-one assistance through a volunteer homework helper program. The centers were able to purchase five multimedia computers with CD-ROM minichangers and software. The Mohawk Valley Library Association used funding to publicize the program using fluorescent pencils printed with the slogan "Homework is a BLAST," and by printing homework and research aids booklets for individual use by students. The centers printed posters, bookmarks, sign-up forms for recruiting volunteers to work with young people, and survey forms for evaluating the use of multimedia computers and the homework center.

The centers recruited thirty-six homework helpers—from teenagers to senior citizens—to work in the centers to help young people use the CD-ROM programs for their homework. The libraries used the computers to create homework centers in easily accessible locations, purchasing additional “homework helper” materials for the centers. They effectively promoted the project through class visits, letters to teachers, and other cooperative efforts with the schools. A young person browsing through CD-ROM programs over the summer remarked: “Hey, I bet this would be good for research projects when school starts again.” Ronald McDonald Childrens’ Charities has provided funds to establish homework centers in two more libraries (Rokos, 1994).

Some librarians also see homework centers as resources for latchkey children, young people at risk, and as a way to promote lifelong learning. “A homework center in your public library...will provide your library with visibility and help parents and educators understand more fully the role of the public library in promoting learning, not only in support of the education of their children, but also as an avenue for lifelong learning opportunities” (Brewer, 1992, p. 212).

“As more families find that both parents must work, children find that after-school hours are more enjoyable and productive—and usually safer—in a library atmosphere than at home alone . . .” according to the National Association for Towns and Townships (“Consider This...,” 1994, p. 10).

Brewer (1992) discusses the Seaside Homework Center developed at the Seaside Branch, Monterey County (CA) Free Libraries, which includes four programs: (1) drop-in homework assistance; (2) library skills instruction; (3) one-on-one tutoring; and (4) Reading Partners. Reading Partners pairs a tutor with a child who needs help in reading. The tutor and the child take turns reading aloud to each other and together select books for the child to borrow.

Although homework programs help latchkey children, Brewer comments that: “It is ironic that with the continuing ‘problem’ of latchkey children, so many libraries have reference policies that discriminate against homework questions” (p. 208). Brewer challenges more librarians to provide the help to younger students that would enable them to succeed at school.

Latchkey kids are active users of the library. Another group of active library users are families educating their children at home. *CQ Quarterly* documents the increase in the number of families keeping children home to learn at their own pace. Thousands of families concerned about religious or family values, overcrowded classrooms, violence in the schools, or low academic performance are creating home classrooms tailored to

meet the needs of their children. Statistics provided by the National Home Education Research Institute indicate that estimates of the number of children being home schooled have risen from 12,500 in 1978 to 500,000 in 1994, approximately one percent of school-age children ("Home Schooling," 1994, p. 772). A large percentage of the children being educated at home are K-5 school age, but frequently older children are also being schooled at home.

Parents who educate their children at home use public libraries heavily and may have a significant impact on rural libraries. Walters cites the Parmly Billings Library (MT), which serves 300 home-schooling families, many with two or three children. Up to 300 people may attend library programs, many of them home schoolers (G. Walter, personal communication, September 30, 1994).

Because parents who teach their children at home often use the library as a learning center, they are especially aware of service barriers. Limited library hours are a barrier when libraries are closed mornings or open in late afternoon, closed during the dinner hours then open again for a few hours in the evening. Another barrier is the failure to have up-to-date materials, especially in areas such as science and technology. Home schoolers may create learning units based on a child's current interest in a subject. Delays in receiving information through interlibrary loan, however, may result in the child losing interest in the topic by the time the material is received.

If home educators encounter hostility from school administrators and other parents and adults in the community, they may be hesitant to identify themselves to the librarian. Therefore, parents do not learn about specific services unless the library routinely informs patrons about library services. Parents who teach at home may or may not belong to an organized group, so publicizing library programs and services may be difficult. The librarian may make it clear that home schoolers are welcome with signs and brochures.

Home-schooling families may contribute to a library in a number of ways. Parents seeking programs for their children may be available to conduct story times. Community service is often part of the home-schooling curriculum, allowing children taught at home to perform their own plays or puppet shows at the library. Parents may suggest books and other materials recommended for purchase and may be willing to help raise funds or to apply for grants to purchase library materials.

WORK WITH SCHOOLS

When libraries serve children and families scattered over a wide geographic area, librarians need to find ways to inform families about library services. Schools provide a very effective way to reach children. Children's

Services Consultant, Sue Rokos, Mohawk Valley Library Association (NY), reports that cooperation with local schools continues to be the single best way to promote projects aimed at school-age children. Public librarians in the Mohawk Valley region publicize their CD-ROM-based homework centers through visits to classrooms. Teachers and other school contacts are very positive and supportive (Rokos, S., 1994).

In West Virginia, the public library takes a step further in cooperation with schools. One-third of all public libraries are located on or near school properties, and the public library acts as a school library. School districts actually donate land to encourage public libraries to locate near schools.

Some school and public libraries combine efforts to better serve the community. "Faced with providing more services to your community while dealing with an uncertain budget? An old idea has found new life across the country..." (Kinsey & Honig-Bear, 1994, p. 37). Kinsey and Honig-Bear (1994) discuss joint-use libraries developed in partnership between the Washoe County Library (Reno, Nevada) and the Washoe County School District. These libraries are operated by school librarians for the students during the school day; the libraries are operated by public library staff for the general public after the school day ends and on weekends. The Washoe County Library and the School District make special arrangements to keep the libraries open during school holidays, conference days, and vacation periods. Advantages include enhanced services for students, teachers, and the public. Students have immediate access to the public library's online database which includes community information as well as information about books in the collection and access to up-to-date computer technology. Reserves can be made for materials throughout the system. When teachers enhance class assignments by assigning research in the joint-use library, students do not need to make special trips to a public library outside of the school building. The Washoe County Library extension librarian provides training to personnel in storytelling, book talks, collection development, and management issues.

The success of the Washoe County joint-use libraries—one of which serves Gerlach, Nevada, a community of approximately 500 people isolated from educational and cultural opportunities—depends on: (1) support from top administration; (2) joint-use committees which include representatives from the community, the school, and the public library; (3) contractual agreements; and (4) annual review and modification of agreements (p. 38).

Not all combined library efforts are successful. New York State Youth Consultant, Anne Simon, comments that school/public library consolidations in school buildings have not worked out well over time, partly because school populations grow larger, or schools need more classrooms

to provide special services. School needs take precedence over public library needs, so when school populations expand, the schools may take back the library space (A. Simon, personal communication, November 25, 1994).

Benne (1991) discusses the relationship between school and public libraries in rural communities in great detail, pointing out that "there is no evidence that combining libraries results in savings; on the contrary, the reverse is the more likely to result if service is maintained at an adequate level for all age groups" (p. 230). Benne contrasts the responsibility of the school library to support the curriculum and the educational goals of the school with the public library's responsibility to serve the library needs of all age groups in its service area.

Barriers to combining school and public libraries mean that many schools and communities are not candidates for combined facilities. However, merging small budgets may make a difference. The Washoe County experience demonstrates that extensive planning, under the right circumstances, can lead to successful combined school/public libraries.

CONDUCT SUMMER READING CLUBS

For many children, a summer of reading can mean voyages across towns or across time—depending on the books. For children in many communities across the country, summer reading can have structure through library reading clubs. Children may sign up on their own or because their parents encourage them. Parents report that: "This program makes reading fun," or "My boys have enjoyed the reading program for three years and look forward to it every summer." The program requires each child to read for a certain number of minutes each day or read a certain number of books and report on the books read. The one-on-one attention that the children receive is an integral part of a program involving interesting themes, summer activities, recognition for reading, special programs, speakers, crafts, dramatics, and displays. Children receive charts on which to record the number of books that they read and certificates for meeting the program requirements. Children may read fiction or nonfiction, and they do not have to limit themselves to the minimum requirement. Voracious readers have been known to devour 100 books, but in most communities, the program is not competitive.

Parents recognize that summer reading is important in maintaining learning readiness when they say things such as: "Reading moves to the back burner in the summer. The library program gives it [learning] priority over play" (Wigg, 1994). Research has shown that reading during the summer is the best way to maintain vocabulary and comprehension skills during the months when a child is not in school (Locke, 1988, p. 82). Summer reading also expands a child's knowledge. The summer

reading programs provide a structured way to encourage children to read during the summer, introduce children to the wide range of available literature, provide a focus for publicity about library services, and help children maintain reading skills.

Vermont, Montana, Louisiana, and New York are just a few of the states organizing statewide programs which make it possible for rural libraries to participate in statewide summer reading programs. In Montana, the state children's consultant works closely with state level reading specialists and education department staff to conduct a joint presentation on the family reading program at the state reading association conference. Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota cooperate to develop a summer reading program; in 1994 these states cosponsored "Go Wild for Libraries" with art work by children's book illustrator Lynne Cherry. Experience in New York State, which just completed its fourth annual summer reading program, indicates that libraries participate with more sophisticated programs when themes are developed and supported at the state level.

COMPUTER LITERACY

New information technologies enable rural libraries to connect young people with information across the state, country, and world. McClure et al. (1994) describe a grant-funded project, Project GAIN (Global Access Information Network), which in New York State provided Internet access and training to five rural public libraries and one Indian Nation school. The project emphasized training for public librarians and promoting the project to the community by publicizing information available through the Internet. Although no specific effort was made to involve children, teachers found multiple uses for Internet information in the classroom. Teachers discovered lesson plans, pathfinders to network resources, bibliographies, digests, and topic-specific mini-searches on AskERIC, an Internet-based program run by Syracuse University as part of the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) system managed by the U. S. Department of Education. Staff at AskERIC answer e-mail questions using the ERIC database and by referring the patron to both Internet- and print-based resources.

In one school, seventh-grade students used the Internet to locate information on current events for a project called "Clash of Issues." In another, a teacher organized a keypal (pen pal on the Internet) project for her students with children in New Zealand. The students needed to convert kilos and meters into pounds and feet in order to exchange information about their height and weight. "Thus, the exchange provided the opportunity to apply math skills in real-time and in a real problem-solving context that was relevant and interesting to the children" (McClure et al., 1994, p. 21).

Students, as enthusiastic users of technology, are impressed when the library is able to provide electronic access to information. According to one teacher: "The kids now say, 'The library is awesome!'" This view of libraries "is important for stimulating and nurturing children's development and for laying the foundation for lifelong learning at an early stage of their lives" (McClure et al., 1994, pp. 21-22).

The five Project GAIN libraries received hardware, software, equipment, training, user services, and technical support. Many rural libraries need technical support and encouragement to integrate computers and telecommunications into library services. In a conversation with Joan F. Cooke, Children's Services librarian, Finger Lakes Library System (NY), she said: "This is like a third world country, jumping from the 19th century to the 21st century. Funding is still too scarce for libraries in the Finger Lakes Library System. . . . Libraries have not had enough training to use the Internet yet. You're talking about Internet, we're still talking about automating" (J. F. Cooke, personal communication, November 11, 1994). Rural libraries need technical assistance in integrating computer technology into library services, in assessing the value of new services to children, and in creating community support for information technology.

LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS AND THE STATE LIBRARY

The New York State Library Development Team consists of seven state-level consultants with regional responsibilities for seventy-four library systems. Anne Simon, a state-level consultant, spends 25 percent of her time on youth services in addition to serving on the team as regional consultant and consultant to school library systems. The Library Development Team relies on library systems to provide support to member libraries based on the needs in each region. Of the twenty-three public library systems authorized by law, all but 2 of the 741 public libraries in the state are members. Library systems provide support, continuing education, and consultation to rural library staffs. In addition, the Youth Services Section of the New York Library Association provides workshops and publications for its members. Simon maintains contact with youth services leaders by serving as the official liaison to the Youth Services Section (A. Simon, personal communication, November 25, 1994).

Feehan (1992) reports on the status of youth services consultants in other states, summarizing the results of a 1988 survey sent to fifty state library agencies to compile information about state-level youth consultants (p. 24):

- Number of states with full-time youth services positions 12 (25%)
- Number of states with part-time youth services positions 24 (47%)
- Number of states with no youth services positions 10 (20%)
- Number of states with youth services position vacancies 4 (8%)

The survey shows that the majority of state-level youth services consultants work part time on library service. Rollock (1988) describes the work of Faith Hektoen, a longtime state agency consultant in Connecticut with a strong background in children's library work, who no longer devotes full time to youth services. Hektoen suggests that providing across-the-board consultant services gets the consultant "out of isolation" and forces attention to the overall program of the public library in which children's services play an important role. "In this way, she can bring to children's librarians with whom she works increased awareness of some of the external factors that have an impact on the entire library program, and can . . . reinforce concern for children's services in directors and other staff members with whom she works" (p. 29).

A number of states provide children's services grants that assist rural libraries to initiate new services. The New York State legislature funds up to a total of \$300,000 grants which foster services to children and their parents. The program requires that the project director is a professional librarian, but this requirement is not an impediment to small rural libraries because library system staff can act as project coordinator. The state awards grants to small libraries to provide support to families with children with learning disabilities; to work with literacy volunteers to offer Saturday parent/child programs having a strong literacy component for parents; and to develop parenting and preschool readiness activities which will bring isolated, rural families to the library (Shubert, 1994).

The Vermont Department of Libraries awards mini-grants to public libraries to carry out special projects for young people. The 1994 grants were for: (1) turning a storage room into a young adult room, decorating it with tiles which the kids will make, and instituting the "Blueberry Medal" for a young adult book; (2) sponsoring an eight-week parent/child project to create cloth books; (3) establishing a "Read to Me" area with carpet, rocking chair, and books for babies and toddlers; (4) sponsoring programs for parents and children on growing up, and developing circulating kits of videos and books on the subject. In 1995, libraries are being encouraged to apply for funds to develop programs for preschool children and toddlers, and to increase work with community organizations.

Working with the state legislature, the Oregon State Library instituted a promising program to encourage the development of library programs for children. The State of Oregon established "Oregon Benchmarks: Standards for Measuring Statewide Progress and Government Performance." The benchmarks program measures progress toward specific goals rather than by the program cost or the staff size. Mary Ginnane, library development administrator at the Oregon State Library, states the library goal is directed at ensuring that, by the year 2000, 100 percent of Oregon residents will be served by libraries meeting minimum criteria.

The program identified five minimum criteria that must be completed to accomplish this goal—including one which focuses on service to children. In support of this benchmark, since 1993, the state targeted all aid for local public libraries toward improving services for children from birth through age fourteen. The Oregon State Library added a Children's Services Consultant position to help implement the program (M. Ginnane, personal communication, October 5, 1994).

Each library is eligible to apply for a grant in an amount determined by a formula which allocates 80 percent of the funds by population of children from birth to age fourteen and 20 percent by square mileage. The funds must be used to establish, develop, or improve public library service to children, with an emphasis on providing services to preschool children. In order to measure progress toward goals, applications must include measurable activities (Scheppke, 1994). Grants to individual libraries funded in 1993-94 include the provision for Spanish language children's books and bilingual story hours, the creation of "Books for Babies" packets, the implementation of holiday story hours, and eight additional hours. The director is expected to spend a minimum of eight hours interviewing students and faculty to learn how the library can begin to develop and improve services to the junior high age group.

In addition to state-funded programs, state libraries administer federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grants for service to residents with special needs resulting from such factors as geographic isolation. New York State awarded LSCA funds to library systems to create programming kits, implement computer programs, develop services for parents, and institute methods to extend summer reading programs to children at risk. Federal LSCA grants fund many creative approaches for extending library service to young people in rural communities. Librarians need more information to adapt to such services for local use.

State associations provide continuing education and support to librarians in rural communities and provide opportunities for statewide networking. In addition to workshops and conferences, they also publish recommended standards and idea exchange manuals, such as the New York Library Association's (1993) "Programming on \$1.98 a Day: A Packet of Ideas for Use with School-Age Children. . .".

CONCLUSION

"We are very child friendly," says Lee Eaton, director of the Beekman Library. The staff are like grandparents to the children" (L. Eaton, personal communication, December 10, 1994). Librarians in rural communities are often passionate about services to children, proud of their ability to furnish individualized service to young people and their families—at their best, rural libraries provide an opportunity for young people to receive personal attention like that they receive in rural schools. It is this

personal attention in school that seems to help students in small schools achieve at equal or higher levels than their counterparts in large schools, despite material disadvantages (Stern, 1994, p. 57).

At the same time, some untrained, inexperienced directors of isolated one-person libraries may falter under the need to do it all. Intimidated by the mystique of working with children, they may be reluctant to weed old books and inexperienced at selecting a story to read aloud during story time. They may feel inadequate to the task of helping parents find ways to encourage their children to read and be unaware of new programs and services being instituted for children in rural communities across the country.

What is needed? A rural library action plan is needed in order to overcome the barriers which prevent rural librarians from making use of existing resources. The plan, based on cooperation among rural librarians, system staff, state-level consultants, and national organizations, would foster:

- more attention to specific needs of rural children;
- analysis of the impact of poverty on children using libraries in rural communities;
- the creation of national networks which allow rural librarians across the country to learn from each other;
- effective ways to provide professional knowledge about new developments in library service to rural librarians;
- development of methods which achieve better documentation of service to children in rural communities;
- adaptation of planning methods for use in one-person libraries;
- the creation of clear, simple manuals which outline services to young people;
- publicity about resources that already exist;
- national grant projects which enhance and highlight service in rural areas; and
- increased attention for rural libraries in national publications, forums, etc.

By strengthening the support system for rural librarians, children in rural communities will benefit greatly from the library service they receive, becoming library users and beginning lifelong learning at an early age. As Eaton fiercely believes: "Whatever you give to a child comes back."

NOTES

- ¹ A few of Ms. Hughes's more recent titles include:
Hughes, S. (1992). *The girl with the green ear: Stories about magic in nature*. New York: A. A. Knopf.

- Hughes, S. (1993). *Giving*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Hughes, S. (1993). *Stories by firelight*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- Hughes, S. (1994). *Hiding*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.
- ² A few of Ms. Williams's more recent titles include:
- Williams, V. B. (1982). *A chair for my mother*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- Williams, V. B. (1987). *Stringbean's trip to the shining sea*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
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- ³ Dorros, A. (1991). *Abuela*. New York: Dutton Children's Books.
- ⁴ Carter, F. (1976). *The education of Little Tree*. New York: Delacorte.
- ⁵ A few of Ms. Hamilton's more recent titles include:
- Hamilton, V. (1990). *The dark way: Stories from the spirit world*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Hamilton, V. (1992). *Drylongso*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Hamilton, V. (1993). *Many thousand gone: African-Americans from slavery to freedom*. New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Hamilton, V. (1993). *Plain city*. New York: Blue Sky Press.
- ⁶ A few of Mr. Yep's more recent titles include:
- Yep, L. (1985). *Dragon steel*. New York: Harper & Row.
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- Yep, L. (1991). *Tongues of jade*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Yep L. (1994). *The junior thunder lord*. Mahwah, NJ: Bridge Water Books.
- ⁷ McMillan, B. (1986). *Counting wildflowers*. New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard.
- ⁸ Crews, D. (1985). *Bicycle race*. New York: Greenwillow Books.
- ⁹ Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York: Viking Press.
- ¹⁰ Carle, E. (1969). *The very hungry caterpillar*. New York: World Publishing Company.
- ¹¹ Bemelmans, L. (1939). *Madeline*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
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Library Outreach Programs in Rural Areas

JUDITH I. BOYCE AND BERT R. BOYCE

ABSTRACT

OUTREACH IS THE ONLY MEANS by which library services can be effectively distributed over rural areas where the population necessary to provide the public financing of quality information service is so dispersed that a single location facility will not be accessible to large portions of the population contributing to the service. Rural areas are served by national information agencies, state information agencies, the libraries of colleges and universities, and by local public libraries—all using outreach methods. Particular efforts have been made to support distance learning activities and health information needs, and it is in these areas that new technology has been most prevalent.

Video and electronic digital media are beginning to have some effect on rural outreach activities, but most service is still provided by small local libraries or branches, by bookmobiles, by depository collections, and by books-by-mail programs. The immediate effect of the new technologies seems to be to support these programs rather than supplant them.

THE PROBLEM

Library use of outreach programs in rural areas is the focus of this article. The libraries involved are primarily facilities attempting to serve a population so dispersed and distributed as to make major use of a central facility unlikely and difficult for a portion of the people served. It is important to understand that if by rural library service we mean services

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provided by public libraries in communities of fewer than 2,500 people—the U.S. Bureau of Census' definition of rural—we are talking about libraries with budgets of about \$15,000 per year. If we include libraries that serve populations of less than 25,000, as does Vavrek (1990), we increase the average budget to only \$81,000. Such libraries are not likely to have sophisticated or expensive equipment or large numbers of highly trained and experienced personnel. On the other hand, they are likely to have personnel with close ties to the community and an excellent understanding of community needs and desires. One need only read the testimony of Hales (1992) of the Suwannee River Regional Library in Live Oak, Florida, to get a feel for the limited availability of resources to that large portion of our public libraries that serve small populations.

THE RURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS PROBLEMS

The problems of rural library service may be characterized in simple terms of cost and distance. Library service costs money. As a public good, its cost is distributed over a large number of people, and its services are available to all of these. Where people are concentrated, this works well enough since, for a small individual cost, a significantly effective facility in relatively easy reach of all the contributors can be provided. When the population is dispersed, a far larger area is needed to provide the resources for an effective information service facility. By the very nature of the situation, this facility cannot be in easy reach of all those who must contribute to its support, unless it is itself distributed over the distances involved. This distribution of facilities and services is what we mean by rural outreach.

THE CONCEPT OF OUTREACH AND ITS METHODS

There are a great many unserved, but potential, library patrons in rural areas. A basic willingness to do what is necessary to serve the unserved is what outreach is all about. A formal definition of the term is more difficult to find. As Weibel (1982) says:

While the term *outreach* is used extensively in library literature from the mid-sixties on, a specific definition is not readily offered. Outreach is often used interchangeably with synonyms such as *extension* and the phrases "service to the disadvantaged" or "unserved," and "community" or "inner-city service." Modifications in the goals or type of library service described can be seen over the period examined, while the interchangeability of terms and the lack of specificity of their definition remains. (p. 5)

There is, of course, associated with the term outreach, the concept that service must be proactively extended beyond the walls of the library building to the actual area of need for service. Some sense of community

involvement in library decision making is often implied as well. New service populations may require new services and new materials. As Tate (1972) said: "In many cases 'reaching out' has meant handing out the same old wares in a different way" (p. 3). In more recent years, the wares have indeed changed both inside and outside library walls. Certainly modern outreach service seems to center on delivery mechanisms to external clients. That which is delivered is generally that which is also available within the library building. Assuming that these deliverables are among those that the community needs and desires, this is appropriate. The community, of course, should be studied to ascertain whether or not this is the case, and if not, just what the needs might be.

deGruyter (1982) finds rural library use about equally divided between reading for entertainment and "trying to obtain useful knowledge." She determines that the rural library user is more active in cultural and social activities and has more education than the nonuser. A classic study is that of Bundy (1960). She found that the farmer was not a reader of books but rather a reader of a regular flow of bulletins and journals related to agricultural practices that may increase efficiency. She says: "To the farmer, a library is an agency for women and children, not geared to the farmer's interests and not planned around his convenience" (p. 146). Vavrek (1990), thirty years later, finds that seven out of ten rural library clients are women (p. 2). It would appear that rural library service, whatever delivery system it may use, has yet to appeal to the males of the rural family.

The traditional library outreach mechanisms provide books and other materials to those who are unlikely or unable to reach the physical library. Philip (1989) lists branches, mail delivery, and bookmobiles as the prime methods but also considers depository collections and other institutional outreach services involving delivery of materials to facilities whose inhabitants cannot easily access what is necessary to meet their information needs. The truly rural library will be hard pressed to provide traditional library outreach mechanisms since its budget may simply not stretch to cover such expense. Outreach in libraries with budgets below \$81,000 a year will rely on their staff's knowledge of community needs and their ability and commitment to personally provide services outside the library's walls. Books by mail and bookmobiles are far from low cost delivery systems. Boyce and Boyce (1989) found that:

If we assume a ten year vehicle life, an initial cost of \$45,000 and \$2,000 per year for maintenance then the mobile facility costs \$6,500 per year or about fourteen cents per circulation. No reliable estimate of fuel costs is available but if one assumes \$50 per week that would add \$2,500 to the annual costs and raise the cost per circulation to twenty cents. (p. 46)

This, of course, does not mean that there are not significant outreach services in rural communities. Many library systems have a county wide or larger region of responsibility, and some such systems have both significant urban and rural localities within their service areas. If the service area is large enough and the population willing and able to provide tax revenues for the service, rural outreach is feasible and can be very effective. In fact, despite the economics, bookmobiles and deposit collections are to be found in the smallest service areas.

What does an underfunded library serving a rural population do when faced with the need, or perhaps the mandate, to provide more than traditional ready reference, recreational, and self-help materials? It copes. For instance, let us consider the rural library faced with the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. All libraries are required by law to provide services to the disabled and to have accessible facilities. While the situation has not been broadly studied, Deason et al. (1992) conclude that rural libraries are neither accessible nor do they have materials for use by disabled patrons.

In his study of eighteen facilities in three rural public library systems in Louisiana, Bodin (1994) found that all but one facility had major structural problems and, thus, could only achieve compliance with considerable expenditure; all facilities exhibited less serious and costly problems. However, these libraries did have large-print materials and closed and open captioned videos, and access to the State Library of Louisiana's extensive collections of specialized materials. Most important, they had a positive attitude of service to the disabled and were willing to go to considerable lengths to get information and materials to those who found traditional access a problem. This often meant telephone consultation and that most basic of outreach service, personal delivery of materials by library personnel.

It is certainly technically possible to provide rural communities with wide access to information sources by electronic means. This involves equipment costs and communication charges that will be beyond the means of many of the rural unserved. However, the farmer or the rural business person who has a personal computer and modem for other purposes has access to a growing number of library collections and services. The small rural public library also can have this access if it can afford such equipment and telephone charges.

The Association of Research Libraries (1993) surveyed its membership concerning services to remote access patrons (RAPS). Of the 108 libraries surveyed, 75 responded and, of these, 72 indicated that some form of remote access to their collections or services was currently available. Most allow access to their OPACs without password or charge, and a large number provide remote access to their CD-ROM workstations without passwords. This survey indicates that RAPS are not only students,

faculty, and staff located away from the campus, but that many are not affiliated with the university in which the library operates. Distance learners and the handicapped are taking advantage of these services, which include not only electronic access but circulation, interlibrary loan, reference service, and delivery by electronic means, by commercial courier, by their own library delivery system, and by the post office.

The usefulness of CD-ROM technology for rural outreach is both unclear and unexplored. Moore (1988) suggests that CD-ROM is an ideal vehicle for bringing databases to rural libraries. Certainly this medium makes costs predictable and could put access to business and technical information in small rural libraries. However, a wide scope of databases would still be quite expensive, and it is unclear how such systems can assist in document delivery. Except for their availability on bookmobiles, as reference databases, and particularly in the form of system-wide or broader OPACs, it is yet to be determined what place the CD-ROM medium has in rural outreach.

It would appear that Internet connections are crucial to provide low cost access to such facilities by rural libraries and their patrons. The concept of the public network or free net seems a logical solution to the connection problem. Such networks are operated largely by volunteers and supported by donations from their members and from the business community in their areas. Prairienet, for example, a public access community computing system in Illinois, is free to Illinois residents and available to those out of state for \$50 a year. It provides a great deal of public interest information provided by businesses and other organizations, as well as general Internet access and e-mail service. If access to such systems could be established in rural states on this Illinois model, a rural library would need only a modem, a computer, and a telephone line to make connections. If funds could be generated to allow 800 number access to such a net, the possibilities for rural service seem great indeed. Wilson (1994) demonstrates a clear movement in this direction by describing the National Public Telecomputing Network as "an association that represents 38 Free-Nets operating in 41 states and 8 countries, and 116 formal organizing committees interested in creating local Free-Nets" (p. A17).

We may speculate, however, that the farmer has other sources for his information, particularly the U.S. Department of Agriculture Extension Service, and that information needs in rural areas that can be served by libraries are those of recreational reading and perhaps those in the areas of health, commerce, and education. This limits the perceived value to libraries of investing in electronic access. On the other hand, where the infrastructure for electronic service has been made available, as it has in

North Carolina, information to meet the needs of small business is both available and in use statewide in rural libraries (McGinn, 1990). There is little indication that these services are available outside the physical library, however.

DELIVERY SYSTEMS FOR RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE

Bookmobiles

While there is great potential for electronic delivery of library service to rural patrons, the prime focus of rural library service remains the bookmobile. There are over 1,100 bookmobiles operating in the United States, and 75 percent of bookmobile stops are in communities of less than 5,000 people (Boyce & Boyce, 1991, p. 31). The users are 63 percent female and 51 percent of users are below the age of eighteen. Inter-library loan and reader's advisory services are very common bookmobile services. Over half of the bookmobiles provide reference service, but less than one-third provide community information and referral services. Of the bookmobiles in operation, 23 percent (259 vehicles) are operated by libraries in service areas with a population below 25,000 and so can certainly be considered rural (U.S. Department of Education, 1992, p. 23). Many bookmobiles operated by libraries with larger service areas still serve rural populations.

As reported at two recent national bookmobile conferences, bookmobiles and bookmobile services are changing. The trend in bookmobile design is to incorporate features which accommodate physically challenged patrons and which comply with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. "Half of all bookmobiles being sold are equipped with wheelchair lifts" (Alloway & Hill, 1993, p. 18), while lowered floors, kneeling vehicles, functional steps, and grab bars are also increasing vehicle accessibility to the physically challenged. These new features reflect the changing focus in the outreach programs that many public libraries are adopting to better serve the disadvantaged or other targeted groups such as the elderly or children in day care.

With the addition of various electronic technologies, "bookmobiles are now capable of providing service equal to that available at a small branch" (Alloway, 1992, p. 43). Cellular and data packet radio technologies make online circulation and catalogs possible; CD-ROMs provide access to reference materials and databases; and, very shortly, mobile satellites (MSATs) may make it possible for bookmobiles "to access on-line information including patrons records and library collections, as well as allow for CD-ROM full-text searching and eventually perhaps, linking up with Internet" (Alloway & Hill, 1993, p. 18). More and more new bookmobiles are being designed to accommodate FAX machines and photocopiers.

Libraries that are involved in one sort of outreach activity are likely to be involved in other attempts to bring library service outside the walls of a central location. Many library systems that offer bookmobile service also utilize deposit collections and books by mail.

Books by Mail

The postal service has provided a special subsidized rate for library materials to rural areas since 1928. Lawson and Kielbowicz (1988) provide an excellent history of U.S. government support of the dissemination of library materials through the post office. Actual books-by-mail service began in the 1960s at the North Central Regional Library in Wenatchee, Washington, when Mike Lynch sent an annotated catalog of paperback titles to each system patron with a rural mailbox as an address. Using a business reply card, books could be requested and would later be mailed with return postage enclosed. Since the postal service is required to pick up packages at RFD boxes, the system works well in rural areas and, in conjunction with other outreach methods, has spread nationwide (Knott, 1973).

Thus books-by-mail is a fairly recent innovation by libraries seeking to provide outreach service to patrons residing in remote areas or to those temporarily restrained from obtaining traditional library service due to personal injury, illness, or physical limitation or to family care demands which keep the patron homebound. While the scope of materials accessible through books-by-mail programs may be varied, the most cost efficient and most frequent focus for the programs is in the circulation of popular reading materials. The criteria used to determine eligibility for service and the parameters used to define collection scope and material format (hardbound versus paperback books) were found by Philip (1989) to be significant factors in the success of a mail delivery system.

Schillinger (1993) found that the number of books-by-mail programs had increased from 75 in 1975 to 101 in 1988. His circulation data indicate that these programs serve primarily adult readers. However, the library can control the material made available in this mode and, if children's materials are not in the catalog, they will not be requested. Recent material on books-by-mail programs is quite sparse, but an excellent implementation guide, prepared by the Monterey County California Library (Sulsona, 1987), is available as an ERIC document.

Deposit Collections

McMahon and Fiscus (1992) report that, in the Northwest Territories of Canada, books-by-mail is supplemented by the use of fifty to seventy-five book deposit collections that are circulated by an on-site volunteer. But the Canadian arctic is not alone; deposit collections still exist throughout North America. While there are occasional references to such collections in the literature, no publication has been identified that would constitute a direct study of deposit collections in the last decade.

To be effective, such collections need to be serviced and maintained on a regular schedule by a central library facility. McCallan (1980) points out that deposit collections are "totally at the mercy of the host facility" and often "revert to an unattractive and unused pile of old best sellers" (p. 530). This is certainly a danger, but the deposit collection remains relatively popular. The term used in the U.S. Office of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (1992) report is "other outlets." "Other outlets" is defined as "organizations or institutions with small and frequently changed collections of books and other library materials" (p. 110). Of the 8,978 public libraries contributing to this report, 1,301 maintain at least one deposit collection, and there were 6,598 such collections reported. This actually exceeds the number of branch libraries and is six times the number of bookmobiles (p. 20). Of these deposit collections, 30 percent of them (1,955) are associated with libraries serving areas with fewer than 25,000 people and can therefore be considered rural service outlets. In fact, since many library systems with a service population larger than 25,000 still have significant rural settings in their service area, the actual availability of deposit collections in rural areas is certainly larger.

Deposit collections, books-by-mail, and bookmobiles are all alive and well as rural outreach mechanisms in the last decade of the twentieth century.

Video as an Outreach Mechanism

Television has been used as a medium for distance education and is a means of promoting and publicizing library service in rural areas. In fact, as described by Chepesiuk (1985) and by Menard and Triche (1988), local public access channels have made it possible for public libraries to broadcast story hours and other in-house programming. Since cable is not available for many rural patrons, this form of outreach has limited potential for rural audiences. Videotaped library programs delivered by other means do not have this drawback. Videos are certainly part of many circulating collections, and tapes of local government bodies, which have been broadcast on cable public access channels, are often made available for circulation. Interviews with authors and artists are a common library video production, as are story times and other library programming efforts.

While Smardo (1982) has found some evidence that videotaped story times are not as effective as live story programs in fostering the development of listening skills in preschool children, video story programs can provide rural libraries with a means to expose children to professionally presented programs as well as outstanding children's books that may not be in the local library collection. By borrowing program videos, such as those produced by the American Library Association, even the smallest library with access to a VCR and a television set can present polished story times.

There is little in the literature to indicate that television is a significant force in rural library outreach. However, it is certainly in use, and public access channel television could be the public library's new "superbookmobile"—an economic outreach service with the capacity to accommodate a broad range of programming that would reach a significant number of new and potential library users. While regular public access programming may still be beyond the ability of small libraries with limited budgets, consortiums of libraries, such as the Library Cable Network in suburban Chicago reported by Ward (1992), can pool their resources to provide effective programming that combines budget and staff effort supports. In any rural environment where cable public access channels are available, the potential to pool such resources would be great.

The public library is not alone in its attempts to provide information services to rural areas. Colleges and universities that are involved in distance education need to provide library service to their remote students. Such students become remote access patrons. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has long been involved in the provision of information to the farm family, and the need for health care information in rural areas has been addressed by the medical community. These institutions all provide services that fit the definition of library outreach.

Rural Health Care Information Systems

Fresh air and fresh garden produce, highways free from traffic snarls, and views of open space lead many of us to perceive that life in the country is healthful. The reality of maintaining good health or returning to health after illness, however, may be more difficult for the rural patient due to the lack of quick and easy access that the rural health professional has to up-to-date medical and health information (Drukenbrod, 1993, p. 35; Dorsch & Landwirth, 1993, p. 377). Reliable health information for the layman is scarce (Paterson, 1985, p. 73), but access to existing consumer health materials is even more scarce, particularly for populations served by rural libraries.

Rural medical professionals, like their urban counterparts, face the constant challenge of providing patients with quality care. Studies show, however, that the rural practitioner is less likely to search the medical literature to answer questions that arise in practice than the urban professional who also underuses the literature (Dorsch & Landwirth, 1993, p. 378). Distance from urban medical centers and medical libraries, along with the lack of telecommunications equipment and prompt document delivery systems linking the centers to rural areas, contribute to the underuse of the literature by rural professionals. The lack of training by many practitioners in searching medical online databases where they are available has also reduced the easy availability of health care information.

Several recent research projects have demonstrated the potential that various techniques and technologies have for providing rural health professionals with access to the medical literature and the information avail-

able at research centers and libraries (Ferguson, 1987, p. 65; Drukenbrod, 1993, p. 35; Moore, 1992, p. 44; Dorsch & Landwirth, 1993, p. 377). Among these are five electronic information delivery systems funded through grants from the Fred Meyer Charitable Trust, Division of Library and Information Resources for the Northwest.

At Eastern Oregon State College, a simultaneous remote searching system (Drukenbrod, 1993, p. 35) links by telephone the terminals at nineteen multitype libraries and one countywide educational service district with the master terminal at the college's search center. The system makes possible the simultaneous transmission of online database information to or from the center's master terminal to that of a second terminal at one of the remote locations. Thus a health practitioner at one of the remote sites can telephone requesting the center's reference staff to conduct an online search, watch the search in progress from the remote terminal, and interact with the librarian by the transfer of keyboard control to refine the search strategy.

In Montana, a statewide document delivery system is being implemented using telefacsimile equipment to deliver business, law, medicine, education, and government information to a variety of service sites, including nonlibraries (Brander, 1987, p. 71). The Faxnet Project provides for the timely delivery of information to rural areas with limited access to information networks, databases, reference assistance, and collections. Although a strong library network exists in Montana, the state has no major research library and must rely heavily on interlibrary loan of resources from out-of-state sites to meet its citizens' information needs. The project proposal calls for the establishment of six permanent telefax sites in Helena and sixteen which rotate on a statewide basis.

INFONET is a minicomputer-based union list and resource sharing network under development at the Oregon Health Sciences University. The unique contribution of INFONET is that the remote end-user will have access to the pooled resources, both professional and bibliographical, of sixty health sciences libraries in Oregon and southwestern Washington. The rural practitioner will also be able to request online database searches and receive the results in either hard copy delivered via postal mail or over the network in electronic form. The rural client will also be able to use electronic mail to request answers to ready reference questions (Johnson, 1987, p. 76).

Optical scanning technology is another of the new technologies being investigated for its potential to transport medical information to rural users in a rapid manner. Using microcomputer technology that is compatible with IBM PCs, the Pacific Northwest Land Grant Universities are testing the viability of transmitting digitized documents as a routine interlibrary loan service. If service expectations can be demonstrated by this project, the present constraints to rapid document delivery posed by

the slowness of the postal system, the expense of special delivery services, and the lack of versatility of telefacsimile machines can be overcome (Johnson, 1987, p. 79).

The Alaska Teletext Project at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks provides users with timely statewide information delivery twenty-four hours per day. Requested information is converted by optical character recognition (OCR) into a digital format which is broadcast on an unused portion of a television channel. The digitized information is pulled off the television signal by decoder/receivers at local sites and laid into microcomputers. Optical character recognition accommodates the conversion of text but not maps, graphics, or scientific notation.

The National Library of Medicine recently awarded thirty competitive contracts to increase the outreach efforts that regional medical libraries direct toward health professionals in rural communities. One of the projects, Grateful MED Outreach, not only provided health practitioners with document delivery (LONESOME DOC) and information service, but also provided them with training in searching NLM's online bibliographic databases. Nearly 100 allied health professionals employed at eight rural Illinois hospitals participated in the eighteen month project conducted by the Library of the Health Sciences at the University of Illinois College of Medicine.

During one-month trial periods at each of the hospitals, project participants learned the basics of database organization, search strategy preparation and controlled vocabulary use, as well as the mechanics of searching NLM's databases by using the menu-driven computer software package developed for Grateful MED. The software managed the online search for the user, from dialing access to the NLM computer, logging on with the user's code and password, conducting the search online, logging off NLM's computer, to automatically downloading the search results to the searcher's computer disk (Dorsch & Landwirth, 1993, p. 377; Drukenbroad, 1993, p. 43).

Public interest in health and health care issues is at an all time high and is reflected by the growing demand for national health insurance, the fitness craze, and the proliferation of diet programs. The demand for information regarding health maintenance, disease prevention, and illness is also on the rise. While the popular and professional health literature devoted to medical self-care is extensive, neither public nor medical libraries have taken an active role in providing the consumer with health information. Serving the consumer is not the medical library's mission—providing medical staff with quick access to current health care information is. Public libraries do help consumers make educated health decisions by collecting nontechnical medical materials. But developing core collections of medical materials appropriate for, and of benefit to, lay people is not generally within the expertise of the public librarian nor compatible with limited library budgets, particularly rural library budgets.

Several consumer health information consortiums do include public libraries, but these generally service urban areas. Of the projects to develop consumer health information collections in public libraries, three are notable for serving rural areas. Rees, at Case Western Reserve University, purchased books for ten Ohio library systems through his Info Health Project funded by a Library Services and Construction Act (Title I) grant. In Syracuse, New York, the Consumer Health Information Consortium prepared two duplicate traveling medical collections containing about fifty selections for lay persons and/or professionals for loan to libraries that expressed interest. A Medical Information Services Pilot Project by the Onondaga County Public Library in New York established a traveling medical collection to help smaller neighboring libraries evaluate the usefulness and appropriateness of specific titles for purchase (Pater-son, 1985, p. 74).

LIBRARY OUTREACH AND THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

USDA extension services make programs available to public libraries when they are requested and also provide copies of some of their publications to libraries for distribution on the same basis. Farmers generally obtain agriculture information via extension agents from land grant colleges and universities. The farmer and the extension agent are male; the public librarian is generally female. There is a patron perception that the hard data come from extension and the fluff from the library. Lynch (1989) believes that libraries will have the most success by interacting with the home economists in the human ecology side of the extension service rather than with the agent. At any rate, most existing cooperation appears to be informal and based upon relationships initiated by the librarian.

The National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, is the chief agricultural library in the United States and contains one of the world's greatest collections of agricultural material. Of the 2 million volumes in the library's collection, approximately 40 percent are works published in other countries and in languages other than English. In addition to U.S. Department of Agriculture publications and other materials published about agriculture and agriculturally related topics, the collection also includes agricultural periodicals and serials, state agricultural publications, and documents published by state extension services and experiment stations (Howard, 1989).

The mission of the library is not only to serve as a research center but also as a library of last resort for anyone in need of agricultural information that is unavailable in local or state information centers or libraries. Such interlibrary loan requests are initiated by a local library serving the information seeker after all other attempts to locate the information have failed. Access to the library's collection through interlibrary loan is usually provided with photocopies of the desired material on a cost basis.

The library also provides users with bibliographic access to agricultural information through its online database, AGRICOLA. As reported by Howard (1989), the database is available to the public in several formats, including machine-readable tape; paper form—i.e., *Bibliography of Agriculture*; and online via DIALOG, BRS, and DIMDI; providing access by other advanced electronic technologies is also being developed. NAL's outreach activities are focused by its information centers.

The Rural Information Center is a unique cooperative venture as a joint project of the Extension Service and the National Agricultural Library. It is one of twelve such centers which perform traditional library activities with a particular topical focus within the NAL but also is responsible for proactive approaches in developing strategies for outreach, dissemination, and the use of new technology (Frank, 1989). The Rural Information Center has the responsibility for providing information and referral services to local rural government officials, particularly in the area of development. This is a responsibility that local public and state libraries have often assumed. It remains to be seen whether this cooperative effort between extension and NAL will be able to integrate its efforts with existing public library services.

Off-Campus Library Service for Rural Students

Rural Americans, regardless of their level of employment or economic status, share many of the complex challenges of everyday life experienced by their urban counterparts. Unlike urban Americans, however, rural residents have fewer educational and informational resources to assist them in meeting those challenges. New technologies and regular developments require the small business person to keep current with management and production skills and compel the teacher to learn ways of incorporating the new technologies into the school curriculum to prepare today's students to adapt to tomorrow's technologies. Health care providers, whether they be doctors, nurses, or allied health care professionals, must undergo continual training and keep up to date with medical research findings and health care practices to maintain competency in the provision of basic health care. To be successful, today's farmer must have access to information about farm management, production skills, and product marketing. Rural residents, whether they are engaged in continuing education for improved job performance, enriching their lives through lifelong education, or pursuing higher education beyond the secondary school level, need access to information and library resources generally not available to them in their local rural library if one exists. Rural libraries generally have small collections, lack professional journals and current scientific and technical information, and have limited reference collections (Wilde, 1984, p. 22).

Rural residents are limited in their pursuit of educational opportunities by their physical distance from the centers of higher education found in metropolitan areas. They are prevented from seeking further education

and training because of full-time work schedules and family responsibilities. Universities and colleges are striving to meet the educational needs of rural students through branch universities, extension courses, and course teleconferencing. While branch universities, extension courses, and course teleconferencing make course instruction for a university education possible for many rural students, these instruction methods do not provide access to the library and information resources necessary for self-directed learning, nor do they generally provide instruction in their use.

A few college and university libraries provided support to distant learners as early as 1916, and over thirty universities were providing library extension services in the 1950s (West, 1992, p. 551). To meet the rural student's critical need for information services and university library materials, many more college and university libraries, some in cooperation with public libraries, are devising delivery systems to meet off-campus information and collection needs. The American Library Association has recently revised and reissued guidelines for programs attempting to serve these students (West, 1992, p. 551).

Kascus and Aguilar (1988) listed four options for providing access to library and bibliographic services. These options involved the development of a branch library, the use of a local public library, or the development of a trunk delivery system, which was a type of bookmobile service for students. The fourth option proposed that the campus library assume centrally all responsibility for distant students (West, 1992, pp. 551-552).

One successful experiment to develop the public library as a resource center for the rural student has been the Intermountain Community Learning and Information Services project conducted by Utah State University and funded by the Kellogg Foundation. The intent of the project was to implement a delivery system based on use of telecommunications and a multistate network for resource sharing which would serve the informational needs of rural students in Utah, Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming. By becoming community learning and information centers, these local rural public libraries became the informational resource partners in the delivery of extension education (Wilde, 1984, p. 22; West, 1992, p. 552). Other examples of cooperative academic and public library programs designed to serve the rural student include Laurentian University in Canada, which utilizes public libraries for depository collections (Emmer, 1987, p. 71); and the College of Siskiyous in California, which produced a combined COM catalog of all local and area resources—including college, public, and school libraries—for use by students at all of its seventeen off-campus teaching sites (Emmer, 1987, p. 74). Colleges and universities have also devised a number of other information and resource options using a variety of technologies for serving the off-campus student. Online catalogs, such as that available for the library at

Pennsylvania State University, provide students at remote locations with direct-dial access using terminals and modems for searching the holdings of the library's collection (Emmer, 1987, p. 74). Access to database searching is provided to the students of many off-campus programs through toll-free numbers to library online search services (Emmer, 1987, p. 76). Other extension programs permit students to make telephone requests for reference service and interlibrary loans directly to university library staff.

Dirkwood Community College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, installed a twenty-four hour telephone answering service to handle incoming ILL requests (Emmer, 1987, pp. 76-77). The Elmer E. Rasmuson Library at the University of Alaska, implemented an Extended Campus Services Center that functions as an information broker and delivery service to the thousands of students who pursue their coursework primarily through audioconferencing. The center originally intended to use electronic communication technology, such as electronic mailboxes and dial-up networks to the library's online catalogs, to service the rural students. But the students did not use these technologies, most likely because they were not familiar with them. Telephone service to the university library with a librarian assigned to work with the Extended Campus Service students has been successful. A distance education course to train rural students in information-seeking skills and the use of telecommunications to access the electronic library was instituted in 1991 (West, 1992, pp. 558-59).

University libraries are also using a variety of approaches to provide bibliographic instruction at off-campus locations. Western Michigan University has a bibliographic instruction program utilizing computer-assisted instruction while, at the University of Maryland, librarians working with course instructors integrate bibliographic instruction into specific courses (Emmer, 1987, pp. 79-80). Videotaping library resource orientations and bibliographic instruction are other options universities are using to provide their off-campus students with access to library resources.

Without a doubt, electronic information and education technology can provide the rural student with access to educational opportunities and the vast range of library and informational resources needed to support distance learners. However, the costs of equipment and communication must be contained at a reasonable level.

CONCLUSION

If we consider rural outreach service to be the distribution of library facilities and services over the distances involved in low concentration areas of population, we can conclude that a great deal of work has taken, and continues to take, place. National libraries like NLM and NAL have considerable efforts underway in their areas of interest. Many state library

agencies have a strong interest in promoting service in rural areas, normally by supporting and assisting local public library facilities. A great many academic libraries whose institutions are involved in distance education are looking for various ways to provide library service to support these efforts and are developing concerns for their remote access patrons.

The backbone of library service to rural areas is still the public library. The traditional delivery systems—bookmobiles, books-by-mail, and deposit collections—remain of prime importance, although services and programs available from bookmobiles have evolved and continue to change. The availability of new technology on these vehicles has increased their potential.

This technology has also increased the opportunities for the small rural library to interact with the larger world of information resources. With the growth of free nets, it is currently uncertain whether library facilities will be required for broad information access in rural areas since many users will have access in their homes. However, it seems likely that, in the near future, public access points will be necessary for a great many users. Certainly the professional assistance these can provide is unlikely to be available from other sources.

Electronic access is unlikely to have much effect on the role of the library as a source of recreational reading material in rural areas, although the potential does exist for electronic browsing of library fiction catalogs coupled with e-mail requests filled by U.S. mail or bookmobile delivery.

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Rural Public Libraries in Multitype Library Cooperatives

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ABSTRACT

COOPERATION AMONG LIBRARIES is a practice that supports information service to patrons of all libraries. This article will examine the historical overview of cooperative efforts, the roles identified for the cooperative library organizations and members of the organizations, and the services associated with these organizations. It will also examine the contributions that rural libraries make toward cooperation among all types of libraries and identify challenges for rural libraries participating in networks in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The first and most important thing that libraries should keep in mind when dealing with networks is that it is not necessary for outcomes, products, and uses of networks to be the results of an equal system, but rather that the network be valuable to each of the participants. Equity is not the goal—results are. (Atkinson, 1987, p. 432)

This quote from the late Hugh C. Atkinson is the essence of library cooperation which remains today as it did in 1987 and as it did in the early 1900s. Atkinson used the word “networks.” He could just as easily have said “systems,” “cooperatives,” “interlibrary cooperatives,” “multitype library organizations,” “consortia,” or the more trendy “virtual library.” The most important thing is to realize that the spirit of what Atkinson is saying remains the same. What is also essential to understand is that it applies to any library participating in a cooperative whether it be small or

large, rural, metropolitan, or suburban. The fundamental principle is that, in order for cooperation to succeed, results for the patron must be the goal—not equity between libraries or some magical balance between resources lent by one library and resources received from another library.

This article will provide a definition and overview of cooperation in the United States. It will identify the roles of both the cooperative organization and the rural library in the cooperative and outline common services supported by cooperatives and trends in services in the future. Finally, it will outline challenges and examine some commonly held perceptions about cooperation as it relates to rural libraries, provide some data regarding the benefits of cooperation for rural areas, and discuss service programs.

Throughout the article the author will use the words “cooperative,” “system,” “network,” “cooperative organization,” and “consortium” interchangeably as is a commonly held practice in recent years. Overall, which word is used depends primarily on the perception and common practice of use for those creating the cooperative organization.

WHAT IS COOPERATION?

Cooperation, as defined by Webster's (1973), is “to associate with another or others for mutual, often economic benefit” (p. 250). Other Webster definitions include “working with another for a common end; to act together; given to or marked by willingness and ability to work with others in a common effort; not motivated entirely by selfish individual aims” (p. 250). For cooperative efforts among libraries, this means two or more libraries working together to provide better and enhanced service for the library client or to support programs that cannot be supported by a single library.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Library cooperation in the United States does not have an extended formal history. Rather, the overall growth of formal cooperative efforts between and among libraries is a twentieth-century phenomenon. The efforts in cooperation prior to the twentieth century were limited in scope. In the view of Norman D. Stevens (1979), the establishment of cooperation began at approximately the same time that librarians held their first conference, which was in 1853. It was at that time that a proposal was presented to produce a national union catalog. Certainly the goal of a national catalog, a universal access point, one-stop shopping, or the virtual library has not changed from those beginnings.

Robert McClarren (1981) discusses in depth the overview of public library cooperation. He states that cooperation prior to World War II was more informal, and following the war a more structured cooperative service program began. Even if the pre-World War II efforts in cooperation

were primarily unstructured as McClarren indicates, they did include some profound innovations that remain a major contribution to the library community today. Those innovations include the National Union Catalog in 1901, the Union List of Serials in 1927, and the first Interlibrary Loan Code in 1917. In the late 1950s, public libraries began to incorporate into "systems" or cooperatives. There is a consensus in the library literature that the biggest boon for cooperation was the passage of the federal Library Services Act (LSA) in 1956. The original LSA marked the first time that the federal government identified any responsibility for supporting library programs throughout the United States. It further encouraged and required planning at the state level. It was most significant for rural libraries as the emphasis was on library service to communities of populations of 10,000 or less. The emphasis was on rural library development and on larger units of service. This development clearly was a driving force for the establishment of cooperative organizations, particularly public library cooperatives, supporting rural library development.

The federal funding of libraries changed in 1964 when the act was amended to be the Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA). This amendment ended the sole emphasis on federal funding for rural libraries by adding funding for urban libraries and also added construction to the overall program. The primary impact on multitype cooperation came in 1966 with yet another amendment to LSCA. The section of LSCA known as Title III, Interlibrary Cooperation, established a mechanism to include state, school, college and university, public, and special libraries in networks which could be local, regional, state or interstate in configuration. The intent of LSCA Title III was that there would be a maximum effective use of the limited funds in providing services to citizens. Those formal cooperative efforts that began in the 1950s and 1960s were primarily of four types: (1) A total library program called a "system" was formed by a single political jurisdiction (a city). This agency became a single agency with a multiplicity of branches. These were, and still are, the public library of choice in large cities. (2) A cooperative system established by two or more independent libraries which planned and worked together. In this method of cooperative organization, libraries work together but remain autonomous. (3) A consolidated system formed by two or more independent libraries. The libraries are no longer independent but are one agency. (4) A network established by two or more libraries which planned and worked together, usually with a single purpose, such as OCLC, with its original purpose of shared cataloging.

This article will discuss cooperation among autonomous libraries rather than cooperation among libraries that are in a single consolidated system or single political jurisdiction. However, many of the services are similar in consolidated systems as in cooperative systems, and many of the same reasons for creating consolidated systems are the same for creating cooperative systems.

During this era, several states established statewide efforts in cooperative services. Among the earlier activities were the Illinois Library Systems Act of 1965 in Illinois, the Regional System of Cooperating Libraries of 1965 in Kansas, the Public Library Systems law in New York, and the regional public library networks in Nebraska in 1971 and in California in 1963. Some states, such as Oklahoma, established a consolidated system structure. In most states, the structure has been modified from the original act, but the basic concepts remain, with the states updating the laws based on changes and evolution of cooperation and library service within the states.

GROWTH OF MULTITYPE LIBRARY COOPERATIVES

The library cooperation movement began to move toward cooperation among all types of libraries with the advent of the Interlibrary Cooperation section of LSCA known as Title III. This was the beginning of federal involvement in funding of cooperation among more than one type of library. The federal support of individual libraries began with the passage of Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act for schools and Title II B of the Higher Education Act for academic libraries.

The paths of multitype cooperation took two major directions in the United States. The first was the evolution of public library cooperatives to multitype systems or, in the case of some states, development of cooperatives from the beginning as multitype rather than single type. The second path was the development of another layer of cooperation which included existing single type systems. The development of the networks depended on the political and economic climate in the individual states as well as the philosophies and personalities of the individual leaders who made key contributions to the network development within the states.

Indiana chose the first option and was the first state to establish multitype cooperatives in 1967. Colorado also established their cooperatives as multitype from their inception in 1968. New Jersey cooperatives were established in 1989. Illinois took the successful cooperation model that was created in 1965 and moved it in an evolutionary process to multitype in governance in 1983. New York, however, established another cooperative structure called the Reference and Research Library Systems in 1978 rather than changing or evolving the existing public library system structure. Minnesota also established multicounty multitype library systems in 1979 as an enhancement to the cooperative public library systems that were in existence.

The governance structure of the previously described cooperative arrangements has been primarily through state authorization and, in some cases, funded with state dollars or, in others, authorized by state statutes with funding coming primarily from the federal LSCA programs. There is another type of governing structure that is often found in multitype

cooperatives as they are established as not-for-profit corporations—as 501 C3 organizations. Certainly OCLC is the largest of the cooperative organizations of this type. Major regional networks such as SOLINET, PALINET, and AMIGOS are all part of this multitype cooperative activity that took place in the United States.

Within the last eight years, several statewide developments have occurred. California has invested time and money in a multiyear planning process in order to implement a statewide multitype library network. Illinois in 1985 commissioned a study to look at the library systems in Illinois. One of the key recommendations of *Vision, 1996, A Plan for the Illinois Library Systems in the Next Decade* (HBW Associates, 1986) was to reduce the number of systems in Illinois from the eighteen existing at that time (p. 155). In yet another evolutionary process involving local decision making, the number of Illinois systems has been reduced to twelve. New York also commissioned a study of systems which recommended eliminating the research and reference library systems structure. In Indiana, the area library service authorities are in the process of becoming a single statewide program rather than a regionally based network.

These changes have meant a different means of supporting and providing cooperative service to members. This is especially true in the case of rural libraries where dependence on the cooperative has been greatest. These evolutionary, and in some instances revolutionary, changes are making way for the facilitation and management of access to broader network services such as the Internet. This development is moving straightaway into the “virtual library” movement which involves not only libraries but also all types of information providers.

In retrospect, it is interesting to reflect on John Cory's (1969) portrayal of the development of library cooperation. He described the single library of any type as the first generation of development, the single type library cooperative as the second generation, the multitype library cooperative as the third generation, and the combination of all types of libraries with nonlibrary agencies as the fourth generation (pp. 264-66). While cooperation has not been that focused in all parts of the United States, it is clear that libraries participate in a different type of cooperation now than they did less than twenty-five years ago. The computer and telecommunication networks are changing the way the world does business, and this affects libraries from rural areas just as much as those in more metropolitan areas.

One constant in the development of multitype cooperation is the goal of broadening access to resources and information so that the result for the client is an easier, more user-friendly, library environment. The overall goal rarely has anything to do with rural or urban, small or large. It is most often the same for all.

ROLES OF MULTITYPE LIBRARY COOPERATIVES

Cooperatives have developed largely as membership organizations. Individual libraries made decisions to join or participate in systems for the opportunities that the cooperative offered to enhance local library service. Even in instances where there is strong encouragement by the state agency to be a member of a cooperative organization, a library can choose not to participate. In some instances, states offer a "carrot" for participating. An example is found in Illinois where local public and school libraries must be members of systems in order to receive per capita grant funding from the state of Illinois. However, the local board has the authority to make the decision on whether or not to participate and receive the services and funding offered by the state.

Since cooperatives exist primarily in a membership environment, the laws that describe multitype cooperatives do not prescribe the service roles of the organization except in broad and general terms. While the term "role" means an expected behavior or a function, the very word "cooperate" sets the framework for these organizations, and the way the organization operates depends on the needs and desires of its members. The Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) support the concept that the roles depend on the individual organization. The standards prescribe in section 4.5.1 that "all parties involved in the Multitype Library Organization are mutually responsible for the development and implementation of the organization's overall Service Program and success of the organization" (p. 11). They further clarify that the governing board is responsible for policy development, and that the chief executive officer is responsible for implementing the policies and the program of service once it is developed.

Regarding the service program, systems are frequently charged with the role of improving access to the resources of the geographic area of the state for the citizens of the state, while other states have a goal of equality of access to resources no matter where the citizen is located geographically. The approaches to fulfilling this role often vary. In some states there is specific mention of interlibrary cooperation and working together to provide access to resources while other states encourage strengthening local libraries and thus improving library service. Finally, most people seem to agree that cooperative library service should improve the quality of library service provided to the clientele, including timeliness of service provision and economies of scale, so that the shared service provided is cost effective for all members.

Since there is not a set of uniform roles for systems, methods for fulfilling various roles differ from state to state. Occasionally a state may make an abrupt change of course as illustrated by recent developments in Illinois where a debate has existed for several years on the provider

and/or the facilitator role for library systems. The HBW Report (HBW Associates, 1986) describes the role that Illinois systems should support for the future:

[The] systems should withdraw from the role of service "provider," and move into a "facilitator" role. The housing of large collections of library materials—collections averaging more than 76,000 books—represent systems providing service. These same materials, disbursed throughout the state, housed with member libraries, and accessible via database, exemplify systems facilitating service. (p. 133)

This trend is not unusual in Illinois and is one that cooperatives are facing in other areas of the United States.

There seems to be a consensus that one role that the cooperative should not fulfill is that of replacing local services and local decision making. Public library service has always been a primary responsibility of the local government in which it is created. That fact has not changed over the decades of public library service and, cooperative service programs, whether they are single or multitype, should not interfere with that tradition. The tradition of local control and local decision making, however, is a key element that challenges cooperative organizations and cooperative decision making. The tension that is created in supporting local needs and expanding and offering wider service will remain a challenge and generate more philosophical, practical, and pragmatic challenges as libraries embark on the virtual library. Another element of the tension is that of agreeing to what local responsibility is vis-à-vis the cooperative's responsibility. As the world of information and information access continues to explode, the roles become more blurred among independent agencies.

ROLES OF MULTITYPE COOPERATIVES IN RURAL LIBRARIES

The following roles seem to encompass the generally accepted roles that cooperatives assume: supporting access to information and resource sharing, library development, innovation, promotion and advocacy, facilitating and coordinating cooperative programs, and equalizing services.

Access to Information

Access to information is critical to all libraries in cooperative organizations; however, it is especially necessary for rural libraries. The many tools to access information are difficult for larger libraries to provide and impossible to harness in libraries that have fewer than five employees. The cooperative can assist libraries in identifying the information that they need to have access to in order to support local clients and, at the same time, negotiate to get the information for the local libraries. In some instances, this is simply providing pointers to the information while in others this may be negotiating contracts to get information in a more cost-effective means than a single library can due to economies of scale.

Resource Sharing

Another role that cooperatives support is resource sharing. This takes many forms throughout the many cooperatives. What it means is that the support for sharing resources is often provided at the level of the cooperative organization. The organization monitors and develops protocols and, in some instances, initiates resource sharing requests. This is changing dramatically as the technological abilities for libraries to do this locally change and expand.

A key segment of the resource sharing picture is for cooperatives to offer opportunities for rural libraries to share their resources with larger libraries. While rural libraries may not have as many total volumes as larger libraries and they may not loan as much, they are, in fact, resource rich for the local community and often for the partners in the cooperative. Traditionally, however, there is a lack of understanding that the resources available in the rural library are needed or desired by other agencies. Often they are not available on shared databases, and rural or small libraries are often the last to get the technology to allow them to be active participants in the larger network. Cooperatives have spent so much of their energy in gaining access to resources of larger organizations for the rural partners that they missed opportunities to make the resources of the small libraries available.

Library Development

Probably one of the most important roles that cooperative organizations support for rural libraries is that of library development. Rural libraries often do not have trained librarians managing the library, and they often have solo librarians or, at the most, fewer than five staff members. They lack opportunity and options for keeping abreast of the changing library services and environment, especially with smaller budgets for purchasing a breadth and depth of library professional tools. To support the development of local library service, cooperatives have engaged extensively in assisting local libraries through professional consulting services. Further, cooperatives often manage and offer extensive continuing education and training programs to provide education for rural library personnel.

Innovation

Since their inception, cooperatives have provided, and continue to provide, the role of "innovator" or "risk taker." For rural libraries especially, this role is essential and needs to be strengthened more and more. Since the majority of public libraries in the United States have budgets under \$50,000 and serve populations below 20,000, this role enables rural libraries to test and try different options in order to make decisions about their future service provision. The challenge for the cooperative and the rural library in this role is that, with innovation and testing, come

changes in service and service provision. This means that the program of the cooperative may be ever-changing and difficult for librarians and trustees to understand.

Promotion and Advocacy

While promotion and advocacy is not a role that is identified specifically in most state laws or rules and regulations, it is a major role that cooperatives have supported for years. This role is often based on the communication network that exists within the organization of member libraries. Since the network already has a means of communicating with member libraries, it is able to share library information updates with members in a more timely manner than other agencies. This will also change as technology provides a more efficient means of communication than the traditional paper communications tools of newsletters, updates, memos, or fax transmissions.

Promoting libraries in general and advocating for library service is something that cooperatives can also do efficiently. While citizens in local rural areas want to know what information the local library has and the local library is in the best position to provide that information, the cooperative is in a good position to support and provide information to funding agencies on a variety of libraries and a variety of library services and information.

Facilitating and Coordinating Cooperative Programs

A major role for cooperatives is to encourage and promote local cooperation. There is very little in the literature about cooperation in rural areas among local library institutions and other local agencies. While it would seem logical that the school and public libraries would have very extensive sharing models in rural areas, the cooperation often is more informal rather than a planned and constantly reviewed process. Although the majority of rural libraries are not partners with local agencies, such as the Cooperative Extension Service, such a partnership would greatly enhance information delivery.

One frequently associates cooperation at the local level with combined school and public libraries. While that is a way to more efficiently utilize a community's library resources in rural areas, it opens the issue of why there are not more formal cooperative efforts between libraries and other information providers within the same community.

The role of the cooperative in this instance is to encourage, to consult, and to provide opportunities for local libraries to work together in addition to offering a means for enhanced local sharing of resources.

Equalization of Service

Another reason for early cooperative efforts was to encourage the equalization of service. The HBW Report (HBW Associates, 1986) on Illinois library systems addresses the issue of equalizing service and concludes

that service could not be equalized as the needs of each individual library were quite different even among similar rural libraries. The citizens want and demand different services from their local library. Equalization of service should not be a goal. What systems could and should do is to equalize the access to resources as the California planning model discussed. It was the equalization of access to the resources, not the equalization of service, that was identified as the goal (pp. 26-34).

WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE RURAL PUBLIC LIBRARY IN COOPERATIVE LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS?

Since overall services roles are developed at the local level and implemented in cooperation among members of the organization, there have been few roles for rural libraries accepted on a widespread basis. The most important role and responsibility that is identified by the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) is for the libraries to honor membership and service program commitments (p. 13).

As a whole, in examining rural public libraries and cooperative organizations, there seems to be little difference in the responsibilities and services that are developed in rural areas and metropolitan cooperatives. The difference, perhaps, is in the implementation; however, the goals and the results that are desired continue to be the same no matter what the size and what type of library is involved in the cooperative organization.

Participate In Decision Making

Because the role, as identified by the standards, is to help the cooperative succeed, the rural library has a responsibility to participate in decision making. The governance structure of state-based multitype cooperatives is often outlined by law. The structure is usually described in broad general terms as to who is eligible for membership on the governing board; most notably it describes that all types of libraries should be represented. It also describes the position of individuals who can represent the member libraries. The law leaves local decisions on representation to the local cooperative. There are often opportunities in the bylaws of cooperatives for geographical representation by region, size of library, or other elements. Rural public libraries need to be represented on governing boards and to be active participants.

There are also opportunities for service on other committees within the cooperative organizations. This is often in the development or evaluation of system services or service programs. Again the rural library needs to be represented. Personnel in those libraries have a great deal to offer the entire constituency of the cooperative regarding the perspective of local service needs and desires.

Meeting Local Needs

Because personnel in rural libraries are often closer to the customer than those in larger libraries due to the numbers of staff members and the limited population in the service area, they often are more aware of the overall needs. Rural libraries, just as other libraries, should support local needs. The rural library must be sure that it has adequate hours to support the needs of the community so that patrons will have opportunities to use the library at convenient times. It is essential that the rural library make every effort to entice local patrons into the library. The library also has to be willing to purchase materials of all types and not just those materials that are safe and without controversy. There are some views by personnel in larger libraries that smaller libraries do not buy controversial materials but simply borrow them on interlibrary loan so that they do not have to face discussions at the local level.

Make Collections Accessible to Other Participating Members

Another role that the rural library needs to play is to offer to share the resources that it has. While most rural libraries are more than willing to share, they often have not had that opportunity. A library cannot easily share if what it owns is not available on an electronic database. This means that the library will need to participate and probably spend some precious local funds to have collections made available in shared databases at the regional, state, and national level. This will further mean that the library will have to follow national standards in order to be able to effectively share resources.

Rural public libraries often have an image problem within the local community, within the library and the board of the library, within the cooperative, and throughout the library community. That image problem is the commonly held belief that small libraries, and especially rural libraries, have little if anything of value to share with other libraries. Some believe large libraries have the unique items to share and that small or rural libraries have only duplicates. According to Atkinson (1987), there are unique items in almost every type and size of library; there just are fewer unique items in small libraries (p. 437). However, that does not make the resources of any less value. It is clear that, when the small and rural library is a member of a cooperative organization with a means to offer resources to the other partners, it has provided, and does provide, a major contribution to resource sharing in the network.

The image problem further seems to be that residents in rural communities do not realize the wealth of resources and access to resources that are available in the community. The rural residents often think that they will find everything that they want in larger, more metropolitan, libraries. The fact is that resources are often easier to obtain in a rural library. Customer service is more personalized and the local demand for newer material is usually lower.

Honor Membership Responsibilities and Commitments

The most important thing that any member of a cooperative can do is honor responsibilities and commitments. This means to support all the roles previously described and to meet any agreed upon policies of the cooperative organization. For example, if the policy of the cooperative is to offer reciprocal borrowing among libraries in the network, and policy requires that library cards be validated every year, then the rural library must comply with that agreement. While it may seem like an undesirable step in a rural area where one knows all the borrowers, it is essential in a larger library where the staff simply does not know everyone. Compliance to agreed upon responsibilities make the entire process of interlibrary cooperation work effectively for everyone.

It is also important for the rural library to expect that other libraries in the network will honor their membership responsibilities. Frequently, personnel in rural libraries overlook noncompliance with policies by larger libraries. The reason sometimes relates to fear that the larger library simply will not participate in the network at all if they have to follow the policies, and the rural library may believe that the larger library does not need the network as much as they need it.

WHAT ARE THE SERVICES THAT A COOPERATIVE LIBRARY SERVICE PROVIDES TO ITS MEMBERS?

As described previously, the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies, 1990) states that: "All parties involved in the Multitype Library Organization are mutually responsible for the development and implementation of the organization's overall Service Program and success of the organization" (p. 11). Just as there is no universal agreement on the roles of the member library and the cooperative, there is no agreement on what services should be part of a cooperative. In addition, there is no universal means of "grouping" the services.

The appendix in the *Standards for Cooperative Multitype Library Organizations* (1990) offers a list of fifty-six sample services undertaken by multitype organizations (p. 17). The list was not designed to be comprehensive but that of commonly supported services. In 1991, Illinois adopted standards for services for Illinois Multitype Library Systems. The document describes eight core services for Illinois Library Systems including: automation, bibliographic access, delivery, consulting, continuing education, reference, interlibrary loan, and reciprocal access (Fiels et al., 1991). The New York study identified basic reference and research library system services including interlibrary loan request processing; verifying and locating materials; reference, referral and research; retrospective conversion; union list/catalog production; delivery; consultant services; continuing education; communications services; and direct access

to member collections (Griffiths & King, 1989, p. 12). In each of these documents, there is a clear indication that these are not necessarily the only services that a cooperative provides. In the case of Illinois and New York, it is clear that these should be the basic or core services.

Others have described the services of cooperatives by functional means such as access to information, communication and public information, consulting and continuing education, resource sharing, development and expansion of library service, support services, and governance and management. All of these groupings are the primary means of describing to members, governing officials, funding agencies, and the general public the programs of the cooperative organization.

This list of service programs provided by the author in the following section also includes service names and brief descriptions. The programs described are not an exhaustive list, nor are these meant to imply that programs not described are not appropriate for multitype library organizations. Further, the grouping by function is the view of the author on how the service would be categorized.

Access to Information

The purpose of this function in a cooperative organization is to support access to bibliographic information and on-site resources for maximum access to the collections of individual member libraries. In a shared automation environment, it is also sharing access to all types of databases. Access to information should not be limited to sharing bibliographic resources but should provide a means to share the human resources of personnel in member libraries. Programs that may be associated with this function include:

- *Blind and physically handicapped services*—supporting the Library of Congress Talking Book Service Program
- *Access to a variety of catalog*—shared access to databases of a variety of libraries
- *Access to a variety of other bibliographic databases*—shared access to periodical indexes, CD ROM resources, OCLC First Search, and a wealth of other databases
- *Internet access*—management of access to Internet services for member libraries
- *Directory of personnel resources*—compilation and development of a resource list of personnel available to share expertise with other members
- *Reciprocal on-site access*—negotiating on-site access to collections that are traditionally not accessible, such as in special libraries and special collections
- *Union catalog of resources*—management of an electronic shared bibliographic catalog either through online and shared telecommunications or via CD-ROM catalogs

- *Union list of periodicals*—management and publication of listing of periodical holdings within the geographic area of the cooperative or access to broader periodical holdings

Resource Sharing Function

The resource sharing function is the major focus of many cooperative service organizations. Cooperatives often coordinate and facilitate the sharing of local library resources in all formats. This function is normally designed to optimize the use of all resources within a geographic area. Specific programs that are commonly identified with this function are:

- *Cooperative collection management*—assisting libraries in making arrangements in cooperatively planning and purchasing collections
- *Delivery/courier system*—management of document delivery service of resources that are shared and not able to be provided to the library in an electronic format
- *Document delivery*—management of document delivery service of materials through electronic means such as telefacsimile, using the Internet, providing full-text documents electronically
- *Interlibrary loan*—assisting or facilitating for library-to-library borrowing of materials, through joint arrangements, shared database, or provision of the service
- *Reciprocal borrowing*—supporting a means for clients of one library to obtain borrowing privileges on-site at other member libraries
- *Reference*—management, support, and often answering questions that local libraries cannot answer
- *Reference referral*—supporting a means to assist libraries in locating resources and getting answers to questions by supporting cooperative arrangements between libraries and other information providers
- *Rotating collections*—supporting a means to move selected collections between libraries; collections would be limited in scope and have a limited number of local clientele interested so that resources could be available at the local library

Communications and Public Information Function

The communication and public information function of cooperatives is basic to all the other functions. This assists libraries in making informed decisions on topics of critical importance to member libraries. This function also promotes the services available through the cooperative or through member libraries. Programs associated with this function include:

- *Area-wide news releases*—general announcement of library services available to a broad group of residents in the cooperative service area
- *Bulletin board, printed and/or electronic*—dissemination of information about services, general library information, or shared communication

- *Directory of libraries*—listing of member libraries, including hours of service, personnel, locations, collection specialties, history, etc.
- *Electronic mail*—supporting communication for personnel in member libraries using electronic mail; currently popular using Internet e-mail
- *Newsletters*—regular publication of news information about member libraries, about library news, or general information
- *Public relations materials*—development and distribution of promotional materials to be utilized by member libraries
- *Publications*—publications of manuals, reports from grants, bibliographies, or research
- *Toll free telephone access*—provision of WATS lines for communicating with personnel in the cooperative as well as for data and fax communication

Library Development Function

The services of the development function are designed primarily to assist libraries by providing necessary information to the professional and support staff of member libraries as well as to the governing authorities. The cooperative assists in providing members with an opportunity to gain specialized knowledge needed to make informed decisions. Traditional programs in this function are:

- *Consulting*—assistance and professional advice to librarians and governing authorities on a wide range of library topics and issues
- *Continuing education*—workshops and seminars to expand the knowledge and expertise of the governing authorities and staff of participating libraries
- *Continuing education calendar*—compilation and publication of a listing of continuing education programs
- *Cooperative programming*—assisting libraries to develop joint programs that would meet the needs of several communities
- *Grants management*—management and development of cooperative grant projects to assist in developing local library and shared programs
- *Research and development*—identifying and testing new and different services
- *Special populations programs*—developing and sponsoring programs for special groups of library users. Examples would be service to the physically challenged, literacy programs, service to ethnic populations, etc.
- *Training*—support in assisting librarians to utilize all the information access tools available at the local level

Support Services Function

The support services function assists member libraries or groups of member libraries in providing certain services cooperatively. This function generally provides those services which are considered a local library responsibility and which may be delivered more cost-effectively and more efficiently on a cooperative basis. This function can vary greatly from cooperative to cooperative and from state to state. Services that can be associated with this function include:

- *Contract negotiation*—negotiating with vendors for shared services on behalf of all members
- *Cooperative acquisitions*—supporting a shared acquisitions program including shared database and shared discounts and cooperative collection building
- *Cooperative equipment repair*—supporting a program to provide access or offer a means for libraries to get local equipment repaired
- *Database management*—management of a shared database including protocols and operations
- *Free net support*—management and support of a free net for residents of a geographical region
- *Negotiated group discounts*—negotiating discounts for member libraries with vendors
- *Preservation facilities*—supporting and offering facilities to preserve library materials
- *Printing services*—supporting opportunities to share printing and duplication services for member libraries
- *Shared automation program*—management and support of a computerized library system which provides automated circulation, cataloging, online catalog, media booking, and gateway access to other databases
- *Technical processing function*—management and provision of technical services for libraries, including cataloging, processing, authority control
- *Telecommunications network management*—management of the telecommunications hook ups between the local library and shared network resources

Governance and Management Function

The governance and management function is essential to any network. Networks or cooperatives can choose to implement all or parts of the other functions; however, connecting them in an organized program requires a progressive and responsive administration which exercises sound fiscal planning and provides personnel support to carry out the functions and programs. Services of this function are essential to a strong organization and would include:

- *Evaluation of the cooperative program*—regular evaluation and input on the entire service program
- *Financial reporting*—regular information regarding the financial condition of the organization
- *Governing board and policy generation*—development of policies and protocols to operate the cooperative organization
- *Legislative networking*—assistance with the development and passage of legislation affecting library services
- *Networking with nonlibrary agencies*—assisting libraries and developing a means to access information from nonlibrary agencies as information providers

Benefits for Rural Libraries

Benefits for rural libraries in a cooperative service organization mirror the reason that the organization was originally created. The service programs are designed to meet the needs of all libraries, small and large, and participation in the network provides much broader access to, and delivery of, resources and information to the user. This goes back to the original discussion and basis for networks as described by Hugh C. Atkinson: Results for the users. The users of the rural libraries get results from the sharing and cooperative arrangements in which the library participates. In addition to broader access, the economies of scale or cost efficiency help the rural library better utilize its limited funding resources. Training and continuing education offer opportunities for personnel in rural libraries to have broad access to quality education at a cost that is minimal compared to commercially provided education. The results for the patron are that the library staff is better able to provide library services to meet their changing needs and demands. In every instance, whether rural or metropolitan, it is the resulting benefit for the patron that should be the final test of the success or failure of cooperative library programs.

CONTRIBUTION OF RURAL LIBRARIES

Rural and small libraries are often undervalued in cooperative networks. While the resources that they have do not number the total volumes that are available in larger institutions, the small library may have the one book or the one video that will satisfy the user's demands. The contribution in resources as well as human networking is as William B. Ernst, Jr. stated in 1977: "reciprocal and mutual." The rural library often delivers and supports the network faster than in larger more complex library institutions. The library is not burdened with complex organizational structure and is able to move resources faster. At the same time, rural libraries support customer service as its most important feature. They are often just as concerned about patrons of other libraries as about their own and thus have a dedication to getting the information quickly in order to satisfy user demand.

While the rural library has much to gain from participation in a network, it also has a lot to offer participants. The author has described the patron-initiated interlibrary loan that is being utilized in the Lincoln Trail Libraries System (Ison, 1994). Recently, the System, a primarily geographically rural cooperative headquartered in Champaign, Illinois, added the feature of patron-initiated holds on the public catalogs in the shared automation service program that includes rural libraries from communities of under 5,000 and 10,000 citizens along with population areas of over 50,000. The system manages the shared database of over 1.3 million items for twenty-two libraries. It includes the partial holdings of over eighty different agencies. Through patron-initiated holds, citizens from all participating libraries are able to request materials from other libraries via the shared automation system. The opportunity to do this has been described as virtual borrowing, which is borrowing of materials from a remote library where the transactions are initiated directly by the library patron without mediation from library staff. The materials are then delivered to the patron's home library for pick up by the patron.

A somewhat surprising outgrowth of patron-initiated interlibrary loan is the shifting of the lending away from the larger libraries to a reliance on smaller, more rural, libraries. According to statistics, rural libraries were better able to rely on each other and, in several instances, smaller libraries loaned more than they borrowed from the largest libraries in the consortium. In the same four months that the study was conducted, in every instance, libraries serving a population of 20,000 or fewer increased their percentage of lending to other libraries within the consortium. In every instance, libraries serving a population of over 20,000 decreased their percentage of lending to other libraries and increased borrowing from smaller libraries. Overall, borrowing and lending was up dramatically from the same four months of prior periods with a five-fold increase in activity. This supports a theory that Melvin R. George introduced in 1977 that, with technology, access libraries in a region, similar in size and function, can support a large percentage of interlibrary loan. George predicted that there would be a shift from relying only on the largest of libraries to a more even distribution among different sizes of libraries.

Simple observation by the author has shown that newer materials that have long reserve lists in larger libraries are available on the shelf in smaller libraries. They are available long before larger libraries are able to share with smaller libraries. The key is that citizens in rural and smaller libraries have many of the same interests as those in cities, and rural libraries purchase the resources to meet the demand. However, the volume of the demand and the number of citizens desiring the materials is lower in rural libraries, making the materials available to share more quickly.

While we should not base interlibrary borrowing only on new materials in small or rural libraries, we should definitely take advantage of those resources, especially if a mechanism is in place to easily transport the materials from one library to another. Rural libraries are also rich in unique materials and are continually making these resources available in shared databases. For example, Lincoln Trail Libraries System offers and supports retrospective conversion of holdings. In the more than twenty libraries that have been converted, the overall average of unique materials is 33 percent compared with other information in the shared database. In every instance, there are new and unique items added to this shared resource tool by rural libraries.

Rural libraries are often the only source of local history and local resources for that community or area, and there are often older unique titles in rural libraries that need to be made available to the network. In order to fulfill a role of information provider, the rural library must conform to standards for shared resources. Frequently, however, the governing boards of rural libraries are reluctant to commit financial resources to participate in shared cataloging programs that will permit those libraries to open their resources outside the community. The reason is not necessarily that they do not want to share, it is that the value to them has not been adequately explained.

Another important contribution that the rural library makes is the ability to support the resource sharing activities more quickly than larger libraries. Lincoln Trail Libraries System supports a vehicular delivery service in order to quickly and efficiently get the resources from the lending to the borrowing library. The procedure for the small libraries is to review and sort their holds list prior to the scheduled arrival of the delivery personnel. This enables a patron to request an item on the shared system and often within twenty-four hours have that material delivered to the requesting library. Overall, this shared system and the virtual borrowing that it allows must be coupled with committed staff in all libraries to be sure that the needs of patrons of all libraries are treated as important. The rural library is able to make a great contribution, in speed and dedication, to getting the resources to the libraries, and patrons comment on the quick service under virtual borrowing.

CHALLENGES

Cooperation in a multitype library organization is not without its challenges for the future. Rural and small libraries, as are all libraries, are faced with tremendous upheaval in the means for information and resource delivery. The challenges for rural libraries include dealing with change, obtaining telecommunications, participating in the virtual library, securing adequate funding and staff, and increasing collaboration with other information providers.

Change

The biggest challenge for the future of libraries is found in the rapid pace of change. This is especially overwhelming for libraries with few personnel resources and in areas where tradition is very important. Citizens in rural areas want and need the same opportunities as those in more urban areas, but the need to maintain traditional library service is also important. People want stability in their lives, and the traditional library helps to provide that stability. The challenge of change is to be able to balance the traditional services while providing the information access tools to meet the information needs of today's clientele. More and more services that were traditionally provided by the cooperative, such as verification and searching for interlibrary loan items, are now being shifted to the local library. This workload shift allows the librarian the opportunity to work more closely with the patron in determining exact needs and providing better service. On the other hand, the library will have to provide staff with more training and educational opportunities. At the same time, the ability of citizens to use their own technological resources to gain access to more collections is also growing, and the impact this unknown potential has on library service is unsettling.

The rural librarian must be flexible, willing to take more risks, and understand that change is inevitable and will provide patrons with positive service results.

Telecommunications

With electronic information access comes an immediate challenge for rural libraries—telecommunications costs. While rural libraries and urban libraries for years have been able to mail a letter for the same cost, they have never been able to gain the benefits of telecommunications at the same rate. The proliferation of telephone companies and telecommunications providers has exploded since the deregulation of AT&T in 1984, ten short years ago. In 1994, Congress introduced Senate Bill 1822 to overhaul the sixty-year-old communications law. The reform bill did not pass, but it is anticipated that there must be an overhaul passed soon. Among the elements in any new legislation will be how rural areas can gain equal access to telecommunications services. In many rural areas, there are local and private phone companies that control the local telephone service. Many rural areas cannot get the telephone service to support the needed connections for rural libraries to participate. In addition to the access issue, Congress also needs to address the issue of affordability of access so local libraries can get connected. Because the telecommunications issues are very complex, librarians and trustees in rural libraries must be able to articulate their needs to their Congressmen to assure equal access and cost-efficient access for the local community. This is an area in which the cooperative organization can provide guidance and expertise so that rural libraries and rural communities are not information poor due to lack of telecommunications access.

Ability to Participate in the Virtual Library

As rural libraries acquire appropriate telecommunications, they must be willing contributors to the network by providing access to their resources in an electronic format. This will require changes in attitudes and changes in funding for supporting resource access. As rural libraries participate in shared online catalogs and databases, their resources will be in more demand than they have been in the past. It will take commitment on the part of librarians and trustees in rural areas to be sure that they are able to actively participate and contribute to the library community.

Funding and Staffing

Another challenge that continues for small libraries is the means to fund services to meet the increased demands as well as how to attract, hire, and train staff to meet the needs of the community in the future. The concern of funding is evident especially in the area of telecommunications costs. An Illinois Secretary of State Rural Library Panel report regarding rural library services in Illinois discussed the issue of funding and telecommunications. Rural librarians considered the cost of telecommunications as one of the biggest problems that they faced in the electronic age. The task force also recommended developing new means of delivering formal training to rural librarians since the distance from training sites posed a major problem for the participants who needed to have the training localized. The report recommendations resulted in additional toll free access to shared online catalogs and increased usage of teleconferences to deliver education on a statewide basis (Ryan, 1992, pp. 1-14).

Collaboration with Agencies Other than Libraries

The information explosion is facing other agencies besides libraries. It is essential that the rural library be a leader in collaborative community planning for development of information access to the community. The Information Superhighway, the Internet, the Infobahn, are all realities of 1995 and the future, and local citizens want access to this vast resource. The rural library has an opportunity to be the lead information agency in the community and maintain the community network. Through cooperation with other libraries and other information agencies, the library can be the leader. This will offer new opportunities for multitype cooperation at the regional level as well as at the local level. The Southeast Florida Library and Information Network (SEFLIN) has created a model of regional access to the Internet by managing the local free net for the libraries that are members of the cooperative. The SEFLIN model is one that cooperatives and local libraries should examine so that libraries can provide the network access in the future. Metropolitan models are frequently appropriate to emulate in rural areas. There may be different challenges; however, the desired results are the same, and librarians should learn from the pioneering efforts of others.

CONCLUSION

Multitype library cooperatives and rural libraries are natural partners. The commitment by rural libraries to their customers and the desire to provide increased access to resources at a reasonable cost will continue to be essential in the future. The needs of the patron for more information beyond what is offered locally will continue to grow, and the multitype organization will continue to be a leader and a supporter for shared information resource access. The growing need to share information will encourage a much broader commitment to working with nonlibrary information providers in order to satisfy patron demand, as libraries will not be able to satisfy all users' demands. More networking, more training, and more and different opportunities for information access will produce results for the citizens of all libraries.

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The Rural Information Center Assists Local Communities*

PATRICIA LACAILLE JOHN

ABSTRACT

THE INFORMATION GAP BETWEEN rural and urban areas became a growing concern to rural citizens during the farm crisis of the mid-1980s. Local officials and community leaders expressed to their congressional representatives their fear that this gap would continue to expand, and rural areas would not have ready access to the information resources necessary to help stimulate their depressed economies unless Congress addressed the problem. Therefore, in April 1987, Congress approached the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to propose that it establish a rural assistance information clearinghouse. The USDA readily agreed, and the result was the creation of the Rural Information Center (RIC) as a nationwide information provider to rural officials and communities. This article focuses on RIC's services, information requests, and partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1960s, the primary economic base in rural America shifted from natural resources and agriculture to manufacturing and services. Despite this shift, the rural areas of the 1970s experienced economic and population growth. For the first time in decades, the economies of nonmetropolitan counties grew faster than urban areas. However, the scenario of the 1980s differed greatly. Much of rural America found itself facing rising unemployment, declining population, and increasing poverty. The rural economic crisis of the mid-1980s resulted from a combination of factors—the decline in farmland values; the in-

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crease in global agricultural competition; the economic decline in the rural-based mining, timber, and petroleum industries; and the slow recovery after the economic recession of the early 1980s.

Government officials at all levels became acutely aware that, in spite of the spirit of independence and self-sufficiency considered synonymous with rural America, in many areas, the spirit was in critical need of economic revitalization. Consequently, the USDA began shifting the focus of its rural development policy to include not only the economic well-being of the farmer but also the economic, social, and technical needs of the entire rural community. USDA officials recognized that the economic health of all elements of rural society must be considered in rural development policy. On May 19, 1987, USDA Deputy Secretary Peter Myers testified before the House Agriculture Committee:

So, while keeping the farmer ever in mind, the "people's department" must now turn its attention to the farmers' neighbors—to Main Street, U.S.A.; those neighbors that buy the farmers' products and sell him most of the materials needed to produce them. Their financial health is influenced by the farmers' economic well-being. So all of the help we have been giving to farmers is also important to rural communities, generally.

Farming is the dominant economic activity in many parts of rural America, and we want to continue to nurse it back to health. However, all parties with an interest in the future of rural America have to look at strategies that will diversify the rural economy. Planning officials at all levels of government, plus private industry, must look for economic activities that fit in the rural community... (pp. 2-3)

All interested parties need to look at the basic elements that make a rural society work and at alternative means of providing these elements: the public facilities such as water systems, the availability of venture capital, education, transportation and healthcare....

The most important role will be that of the people—making their decisions, allocating their resources, using their own ingenuity, and setting their own horizons. The Federal Government will be an active and willing associate, working with the people and their local institutions, both public and private. (H. R. 2026, 100th Cong. 1st Sess. (1987))

GRASSROOTS AND CONGRESSIONAL MANDATE

During the farm crisis, the National Advisory Council on Rural Development voiced strong concerns about the capability of rural leaders to access the most current and accurate information at will. The thirty-member council, comprised of rural leaders and officials appointed by the President to advise the Secretary of Agriculture on rural development policy, was worried about information access for rural areas. One of the main concerns expressed by members of the council was that, in this information era, it is essential for rural America to have the same access to information and information-related technologies and resources as urban America. Unfortunately, information technologies were not

reaching rural areas as quickly as urban areas. Therefore, the council recommended that the USDA establish an information service to provide this function.

In the meantime, other rural officials and citizens were voicing their concerns about the information gap in rural America to congressional members. As a result, in April 1987, Congress proposed in House Resolution 2026 that the USDA establish a National Rural Assistance Information Clearinghouse at the National Agricultural Library (NAL) located in Beltsville, Maryland. The purpose of the clearinghouse would be to:

provide and distribute information and data to any industry, organization, or Federal, State, or local government entity, on request, about Federal, State, and local programs and services, and programs and services operated by private nonprofit organizations or institutions, under which individuals residing in, or organizations and State and local government entities operating in, a rural area...may be eligible for any kind of assistance, including, but not limited to, job training, education, health care, economic development assistance, and emotional and financial counseling. (H. R. 2026, 1987, Title II, § 202[b])

The clearinghouse would provide officials and leaders of small rural communities with rapid and direct access to current information on funding programs. The service would link local officials with the appropriate federal program or funding source and eliminate the often difficult and time-consuming effort required to track down this information.

On May 19, 1987, the month following this congressional proposal, in testimony before the Conservation, Credit and Rural Development Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee, Deputy Secretary Peter Myers announced USDA's Six-point Rural Regenerative Initiative outlining the department's new plan to address the problems of rural Main Street. Myers (1987) informed Congress that the third-point was USDA's commitment that:

an information clearinghouse will be established at the National Agricultural Library with an 800 telephone number. Rural community officials will be able to get up-to-date information about Federal programs available to them in a single phone call and will be referred to the appropriate agency for follow-up. (p. 9)

The six-point initiative emphasized information and areas in which the accessibility and delivery of current information are essential—education and training, technical assistance, and research—and, equally important, close department coordination, a factor critical to the success of the entire plan (Vautour, 1987, pp. 29-32; Lyng & Vautour, 1988, pp. 7-8). The initiative stressed “the importance of getting the most effective use of existing resources in assisting economically depressed rural communities in their revitalization effort” (Lyng & Vautour, 1988, p. 7).

USDA JOINT AGENCY PROJECT

In response to USDA's commitment, Congress agreed to fund the clearinghouse as a line item in the NAL budget. However, the clearinghouse concept soon broadened as more USDA officials and agencies, namely NAL and the USDA Extension Service (ES), became involved in the planning process. Within two months, the idea, which had originally started out in Congress as an inventory clearinghouse of funding program information, was evolving into a full-fledged information center (Lyng & Vautour, 1989, p. 23). During RIC's initial evolution, an important theme emerged: Congress, USDA, and rural citizens all agreed on the importance of rural leaders being able to access information at will and the need to establish an information service to provide this function. The Rural Information Center emerged out of a need being voiced from several directions.

On September 3, 1987, Deputy Secretary Peter Myers officially opened the Rural Information Center, a joint agency service of NAL and ES, with two telephoned requests from local officials in Missouri and Georgia. The resulting and continuing cooperation between NAL and ES allows RIC to combine the technical subject-matter expertise of ES's nationwide Cooperative Extension Service (CES) of county extension agents and state subject specialists with the information resources of a national library of more than 2 million volumes emphasizing agriculture and rural information resources—an invaluable and natural merger. Of equal importance was the decision to locate RIC at NAL as one of ten specialized information centers at the library. While NAL's experience and information expertise are invaluable to the success of the RIC project, the CES educational network provides RIC with program expertise as well as a network to rural outreach, contacts, and information dissemination (Frank & John, 1989, pp. 40-43).

USDA initially envisioned that the Rural Information Center would provide rural community officials and citizens with up-to-date information through the CES staff at county extension offices nationwide "serving as the local point of contact across Rural America" (Lyng & Vautour, 1988, p. 7). CES, partially supported by federal funding, provides RIC with a national network of RIC State Extension Coordinators. All fifty states and Guam are participating in the RIC program. The majority of the state coordinators are community development state-level extension specialists located at land grant universities. These coordinators call in requests to RIC which they have received from local officials, tribal officials, community leaders, organizations, county extension agents, or rural citizens. RIC staff responds by sending the requested information to the state coordinator for further analysis, interpretation, and consultation with the requesting official or organization. By 1994, however, 19 percent of RIC's requests came directly from local and tribal officials,

community development organizations, and county extension agents seeking information assistance. Only 4 percent of the center's requests came from state extension specialists.

INFORMATION ASSISTANCE FOR RURAL AREAS

The Rural Information Center is staffed by librarians and technical information specialists with advanced degrees in one or more specialized subject areas, such as social, biological, information, or health sciences. The staff's varied subject backgrounds allow it to research and customize the requested information to best meet the client needs. The center's goal is to meet rural information requirements by placing the best and most timely information available in the hands of public officials and community leaders responsible for making informed decisions and implementing community programs (Nakazawa & John, 1993, pp. 62-65).

The staff provide answers to questions, supply statistical data, provide information about software—usually health or business related—identify economic development videos and software, provide referral information on organizations and subject experts when appropriate, and provide specialized computer searches from both bibliographic and nonbibliographic databases, furnishing full-text information whenever available. The information package may also include, from the NAL collection, pertinent articles, statistical tables, maps illustrating various aspects of rural demographics, or copies of related legislation.

The RIC staff uses several online vendor services to respond to the varied requests received, requests covering the entire range of the subject spectrum. The databases cover subjects ranging from congressional bills to environmental issues to business information to health care and rural educational issues. These online databases contain bibliographic records, case studies, funding programs, numeric data, and full-text sources from newsletters, journals, directories, and other information services.

The center uses the services of well-established online database vendors such as DIALOG, which provides access to NAL's database, AGRICOLA, and LEXIS/NEXIS. RIC also uses NEWSNET, offering full-text coverage of business newsletters; LOGIN, the Local Government Information Network containing case studies and project contacts of interest to local officials; and the Federal Assistance Programs Retrieval System (FAPRS), providing full-text access to the more than 1,300 federal assistance loans, grants, and technical assistance programs of more than fifty agencies.

Rural Information Center staff make NAL collection development recommendations on titles dealing with issues in rural America. In addition, RIC maintains an extensive reference collection covering all rural

topics. Furthermore, RIC ensures that these titles are indexed in AGRICOLA, which provides access to more than 3 million bibliographic records in the NAL collection. RIC's efforts since 1987 greatly enhanced AGRICOLA's content of important rural information publications.

The RIC staff also produces bibliographies, special reference briefs, and other information products focusing on rural issues such as funding assistance, small business development, education, health assistance services, agricultural and farm safety, affordable housing, alternative solid waste disposal, arts programs, financial management, and tourism. RIC currently offers over forty unique publications.

COOPERATIVE INFORMATION EFFORTS

The Rural Information Center staff networks extensively with experts, agencies, and information sources throughout the federal government, enabling the staff to identify and locate unpublished information from reports or statistical data and technical information from federal experts. Thus, a request to RIC links the client to the vast federal information network.

In addition, the Rural Information Center works directly with other federal agencies to improve not only its information products but also those of other departments as well. The Small Business Administration (SBA) and their national Service Corps of Retired Executives Association (SCORE) participated with RIC in a small business information pilot study in which SCORE and RIC identified user information needs. As a result of the pilot study, an information packet of SBA and RIC materials was assembled that RIC distributes to clients seeking general small business and/or funding information (Madigan & Vautour, 1991, pp. 7, 10).

In 1994, at the request of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), the Rural Information Center participated as the beta test site for a complete system redesign of GSA's online database, FAPRS, which, as previously mentioned, provides full-text access to all federal loans, grants, and technical assistance programs. GSA staff worked with RIC staff on site to resolve problems and include system changes to accommodate specific RIC requirements before implementing the new version. FAPRS and RIC staff cooperate closely and, because FAPRS is not an information service, it refers funding requests to RIC for assistance.

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP COMBINES TWO CONGRESSIONAL MANDATES

A federal cooperative effort that greatly enhanced the Rural Information Center's information delivery capabilities is a joint effort between USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Congress mandated, in the *Social Security Act of 1987*, that the DHHS's new Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) establish a national rural health

information clearinghouse service to collect and disseminate rural health care information, including information on health care delivery services, research findings, personnel, policy, financing, and the health status of rural citizens (Lyng & Vautour, 1988, pp. 12-13).

The office works with other federal agencies, states, national organizations, foundations, and private sector organizations in seeking solutions to health care issues and problems in rural communities. ORHP also advises the Secretary of DHHS, Congress, and other federal agencies on the status of national rural health issues. The office administers rural health grant programs, including telemedicine projects, and "plans to expand its commitment to fostering telemedicine networks in rural areas" through increased funding (Hines, 1994, p. 24). In addition, ORHP provides partial funding to the State Offices of Rural Health (SORHs), with a membership of all fifty states, which serves as the primary link to the states for dissemination of rural health care information. ORHP also provides financial support to the National Rural Health Association (NRHA) for the preparation of publications, including the *Journal of Rural Health*. The center works closely with NRHA and networks extensively with the SORHs.

The Office of Rural Health Policy staff has used RIC since it offered its services nationally in October 1988. In September 1989, ORHP approached RIC with a proposal to incorporate the Department of Health and Human Services' rural health center clearinghouse congressional mandate with RIC. The joint effort would prevent duplicating federal rural program efforts. ORHP would also be able to use CES's nationwide network to disseminate rural health information to local communities and locate the health information clearinghouse at a national library.

NAL and DHHS signed a three-year interagency agreement in February 1990 in which NAL agreed to establish, by that October, a rural health information service that would function as a specialized subject component of RIC. This agreement effectively combined the national level responsibilities of two congressionally mandated rural information clearinghouses (Madigan & Vautour, 1991, pp. 7, 10).

In October 1990 the Rural Information Center opened the Rural Information Center Health Service (RICHS). As a result of both the agreement with the Office of Rural Health Policy and a recommendation of President Bush's Working Group on Rural Development, the Rural Information Center acquired an 800 telephone number (1-800-633-7701) to provide easy access for rural officials, communities, organizations, and individuals seeking information on rural issues (President's Economic Policy Council, 1990, p. 17). Under this interagency agreement, DHHS transferred nearly \$1 million to RIC to implement and operate RICHS during fiscal years 1991 to 1992 (John, 1994, pp. 39-45). The RICHS service is so successful that both agencies renewed the agreement in 1993 for an additional five years in which DHHS will transfer more than \$2 million in support of the program.

INFORMATION MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

While questions about rural areas reflect many of the social and economic issues of the more populated urban areas—rising poverty and unemployment, homelessness, drug abuse, to list a few—rural areas also deal with unique problems due to vast distances, remoteness, and relative isolation.

Many local governments find themselves facing the problems of meeting varied and increasing community service and social needs while also experiencing a diminishing population and tax base and a growing elderly population. The Rural Information Center receives many questions from local officials and community organizations seeking information to assist in strategic planning for essential community services and community development. The information that RIC supplies subsequently plays a role in impacting the local decision-making process in rural communities (President's Council on Rural America, 1992, pp. 4, 17).

The Rural Information Center provides important information assistance to many officials, communities, and citizens. Experiences in New Mexico, Vermont, and Idaho exemplify RIC's contribution.

Improved Health Service for a Frontier Hospital

A New Mexico county extension agent discovered, through first-hand experience, that his hospital's thirty-six-year-old x-ray machine did not produce legible x-rays. Seeking funding assistance for this frontier hospital, he called New Mexico's Rural Information Center State Extension Service Coordinator who put him in touch with RIC.

The Rural Information Center supplied him with information about grant-seeking strategies and application procedures and identified a federal grant program for which the hospital potentially could qualify. The county agent used these resources for the text and for justification of a grant request to the New Mexico state legislature which approved a \$260,000 hospital grant. Simultaneously, the agent pursued the federal grant. Five months after approval of the state grant, the agent received a \$215,000 federal hospital grant.

With these two grants, the hospital purchased a variety of hospital equipment, including some for intensive care and surgery, to replace equipment that was more than forty years old. The funds allowed the staff to update their medical facilities and provide improved health care to an isolated rural community located over 150 miles from the nearest urban hospital.

New Markets for a New Mexico Mining Company

A New Mexico mining company asked a regional development organization to assist in the identification of potential markets for zeolite. The mine had several million tons of zeolite. However, the commercial

use of zeolite is still in its infancy. The company knew about only two markets and needed to identify additional ones before it could ensure a profit to expand the zeolite mining operation.

The development organization contacted RIC for new market information. RIC provided a literature search and articles that helped in identifying six new markets including kitty litter, aquarium filtration systems, and supplements for chicken and cattle feed. With this information, the development organization initiated contacts that resulted in determining that potential uses for the product existed justifying the company's decision to proceed with developing a formal market plan.

This information assisted the mining company in retaining twelve existing company jobs in the county and generated annual sales of \$500,000. An unexpected benefit of this project was that the New Mexico State University and the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology initiated research in the areas of zeolite for heavy metal pickup from contaminated oils and soils.

Technical Assistance for a Vermont Entrepreneur

A Vermont county extension service agent contacted the Rural Information Center when a handicapped small-business client, seeking a USDA Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grant, needed the names of electrical contractors who built small variable-speed direct-current motors the businessman needed for his specialized wheel chair invention. The businessman had hit a dead end in obtaining this information, without which he could not complete his grant application.

The Rural Information Center identified an appropriate contact organization and placed a call to a motor manufacturing association to obtain the name of a contact person. The contact provided the names of seven East Coast companies and agreed to act as a referral contact and provide technical assistance. The businessman obtained a Small Business Innovation Research development grant of \$45,000 in the first phase of the SBIR grant process and later obtained additional funding under the second phase.

Idaho Job Retraining Program for Homeless Veterans

An Idaho regional development consortium requested information and funding sources to develop a homeless veterans job program. The Rural Information Center supplied information on the reintegration of homeless veterans into the work force and identified a Rural Demonstration Project funded by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Idaho consortium applied for the project and was one of six successful applicants nationwide. The project, funded for \$180,000 over a period of two years, supports one full-time staff member and other support services. It also provides outreach to homeless veterans, assesses veterans' vocational strengths and weaknesses, and expects to place nearly 50 percent of those involved in the program in jobs.

RURAL INFORMATION: WHO NEEDS WHAT?

Request Volume

The Rural Information Center first expanded its services nationwide beginning in October 1988 and in October 1990 implemented the new toll-free phone service and RICHS. After RIC provided these two services for a year, its information requests jumped 110 percent. During the seven years RIC has offered its service, the number of requests increased 321 percent and publication requests jumped 288 percent.

Clientele

The Rural Information Center processes requests from clients from all walks of life—starting with the President of the United States, White House staff, congressional committees, U.S. senators and representatives, cabinet-level department secretaries, state governors and legislators, and major newspapers and network news shows. Although these high-level, and often urgent, requests make work at the center stimulating, they do not constitute RIC's major users—just the most prominent ones.

Affiliations

Before the implementation of the Rural Information Center Health Service, the Rural Information Center's major clientele was the Cooperative Extension Service (CES), averaging 31 percent of RIC's total annual usage between fiscal years 1989 and 1991. However, after RICHS had been operating for three years, RIC's major clientele became health care professionals, organizations, and state and local health officials—which comprised 20 percent of RIC's FY 1992 usage, 25 percent in 1993, and 34 percent in 1994. Other than a corresponding decrease in CES's annual usage, the rest of RIC's clientele's annual usage remains constant. RIC's FY 1994 breakdown of results is as follows:

• Health care professionals, state and local health offices, organizations, etc.	34%
• Individuals	12%
• Community organizations	9%
• Universities and other educational institutions	8%
• Businesses	8%
• State and county extension service	6%
• USDA officials	6%
• Local officials	5%
• Libraries	3%
• Congress	2%
• Federal officials (non-USDA)	2%
• State officials	2%

- Tribal officials 1%
- Public interest groups 1%
- Foreign officials 1%

Geographic Locations

All fifty states use the Rural Information Center annually. From FY 1988 to 1992, the largest number of requests came from the District of Columbia with annual usage ranging from 7 to 14 percent while Maryland ranked second with 6 to 9 percent annual usage. The high request volume generated from these two jurisdictions corresponds directly to the large number of federal rural program officials, congressional staff, and national community and nonprofit organizations located in the immediate Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Texas, however, has always been close behind—in third place from FY 1989 to 1991, second in 1992 and 1993, and first in 1994. Texas' high use is a direct reflection of the strong statewide rural development program available to its citizens. Between FY 1989 and 1992, only four other states were major RIC users—those states comprising at least four or more percent of RIC's total FY annual requests: Virginia in 1989 and 1991, Colorado in 1990, Missouri in 1991, and North Carolina in 1992.

In FY 1993, the total number of states ranking as major users expanded, and this trend continued in 1994. In FY 1993, Washington, DC remained the Rural Information Center's number one user for the fifth straight year—followed by Texas and Maryland, but three new major users also appeared: Illinois, Pennsylvania, and California. For the first time, RIC's major users included states from the East to the West Coast. This trend continued in FY 1994 when Texas rose to first place, followed in order by Maryland, Pennsylvania, Washington, DC, California, and Arkansas.

Foreign and territorial usage is also rising. Between FY 1989 and 1994, the number of requests received from U.S. territories increased 100 percent while foreign requests increased 240 percent.

Subject Analysis

The Rural Information Center collects request statistics on subjects divided into twelve major categories. The twelve categories include four that fall under the broader rural development category, including community development, small business development, tourism development, and agribusiness. The other categories are health, education, environment, social issues, government, housing, labor, and transportation.

From FY 1988 to FY 1992, rural development requests constituted the largest category of questions received—ranging from 36 percent in 1992 to 71 percent in 1990. However, since 1993, health requests account for the largest category, comprising 38 percent in 1993 and 50 percent in 1994. The remaining seven categories account for about 20 percent of RIC's annual requests.

Due to the Rural Information Center's greatly expanded service in FY 1991 with the implementation of RICHS and toll-free telephone access, health requests jumped from 5 to 28 percent of the total volume, and RIC's total request volume jumped 110 percent in 1991.

Therefore, FY 1990 (see Figure 1) is the best year to illustrate the breakdown of rural development subject requests. The Rural Information Center was totally USDA funded, and the focus was on providing rural development information. By contrast, the present expanded service, which USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services jointly fund, emphasizes both rural development and health information (see Figure 2).

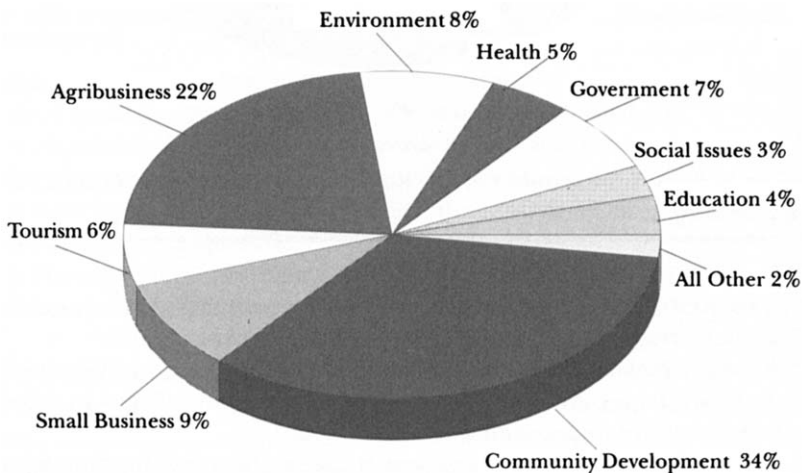


Figure 1: Rural Information Center FY 1990 Subject Requests

Subject Categories

Community Development. In addition to general economic development information, local officials and communities also contact the Rural Information Center for case studies, project models, feasibility studies, strategic planning documents, proposal and grant writing guidelines, and funding program sources. Community officials must manage existing resources and plan new activities to stimulate their economies and create and retain jobs. Representative RIC requestors include:

- An extension agent who needs information and case studies on multicomunity collaborative efforts.

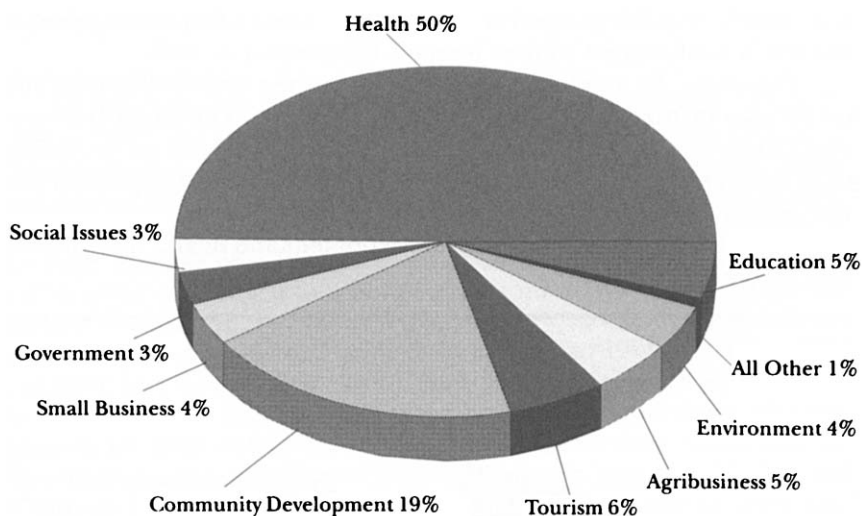


Figure 2. Rural Information Center/Rural Information Center Health Service FY 1994 Subject Requests

- A local official who wants information on community assessment techniques, strategic planning, and grant writing procedures.
- A local official who desires information on rural economic development strategies and funding sources for Alaskan villages in need of infrastructure improvements.
- A chamber of commerce that needs case studies and funding sources for historic preservation and downtown revitalization projects.
- An economic development organization that seeks information on the economic development benefits of prisons and the incentives to attract them to rural communities.

Small Business Development. Local communities seek information and funding sources on attracting, locating, expanding, and retaining new businesses and industries. They also request information on business licensing, industrial regulations, and other legislation affecting business and industry. Local entrepreneurs seek funding sources and information on various economic aspects, such as business start-ups and incubators, planning guidelines, product research, and patent information. Representative Rural Information Center requestors include:

- An individual who looks for information on developing a business plan and starting a home-based business.

- A business that seeks information on locating a high technology operation in a rural area.
- An extension agent who wants success stories on business attraction and retention.
- A Native American community that requires information on researching and developing new cultural products for today's market.

Tourism Development. Many rural communities request information on tourism promotion ideas to attract visitors and help stimulate the local economy. Some communities are lucky enough to already have scenic natural resources and historic areas to attract tourists but may need funding sources and promotion information. Less fortunate communities may need information on developing the actual tourist attraction whether it be a museum, tourist train, amusement park, or festival. Representative RIC requestors include:

- A tourism committee that seeks information on tourism marketing in rural areas.
- A chamber of commerce that looks for restoration information and funding sources for a local historic train station.
- A local tourism council that needs information on establishing a museum and heritage park.
- A county official who wants information on rural eco-tourism.
- A community that desires information on strategic tourism planning.

Agribusiness. Businesses, industries, and entrepreneurs seek information on value-added products and on processing agricultural and natural resource commodities. Farmers also seek information varying from farm management to sources of income diversification such as alternative crops and livestock to establishing a local cooperative or farmer's market. Representative Rural Information Center requestors include:

- An extension agent who wants information on software for agricultural management.
- A nonprofit cooperative that seeks funding sources to develop a cotton textile mill.
- Community farmers who request information on establishing an agricultural cooperative.
- A state extension specialist who needs information on value-added agricultural products and their prospective market outlooks.
- A forest product business group that requests information on how to set up a revolving loan fund or credit union for a regional group of forest product businesses.

Health. The Rural Information Center receives requests in most areas of health, including the status of specific categories of rural citizens—infants, Native Americans, seniors, African Americans, Hispanics, etc. It also receives requests on the recruitment and retention of health personnel and on the application of telecommunications and hospital networks. Other requests concern information on a variety of topics such as health education, child care, agricultural safety and health, mental health, substance abuse, emergency medical service, and health care facilities. The Rural Information Center Health Service does not handle clinical medicine questions and refers these to the National Library of Medicine or the appropriate health information clearinghouse. Representative requestors include:

- A state official who requests information on recruitment models for allied health personnel in rural areas.
- A health care professional who wants information and sources for licensing requirements for nurse practitioners and physician's assistants in medically underserved areas.
- A rural health research institute that needs information on the administration of federally-qualified rural health clinics.
- A hospital administrator who wants information on reasons for rural hospital closures, statistics, and options for diversification.
- A university professor who needs information on the use of telemedicine and telediagnosics for rural health care and on telecommunications for physician training and degreed nursing programs.
- A nonprofit organization that desires information on funding sources for assisting the elderly with purchasing medications.

Education. Rural communities want the same educational opportunities for their children and citizens as are available in urban areas. They seek information about providing public school programs that lower the high school dropout rate and reduce youth alcohol and drug abuse, about obtaining funds to purchase computers for the classroom, about entering into partnerships with local businesses to provide youth training opportunities, and about using new telecommunication technology to enhance the curriculum of public schools and continuing education programs through distance education. Representative requestors include:

- A rural school that needs funding sources to establish a kindergarten program.
- A community organization that wants funding sources for developing model youth leadership, citizenship, and entrepreneurship programs.
- A rural library that requests information on migrant literacy issues and programs.

- A college librarian who seeks funding sources for an Internet node for a public school/college partnership program.
- A school administrator who wants information on the use of distance learning in rural high schools.

Environment. Rural officials seek information on various environmental issues—many of which have both an environmental and economic impact on their community. They need information on legislation, environmental regulations and compliance, natural resource management, wildlife management, water quality issues, recycling programs, and solid and hazardous waste disposal, to list a few. Representative requestors include:

- A community organization that needs information on asbestos removal from an old building.
- A local government that requests funding sources for upgrading a small community water system.
- A rural business that wants funding sources for government testing costs to comply with the Clean Water Act.
- An economic development organization that requires information on costs of trash collection in rural areas.

Government. Rural officials find themselves involved in strategic planning and budget management processes in an effort to stretch their communities' resources further. They look for creative ways to provide the most basic community services, such as police and fire protection, public utilities, community programs, and facilities. Representative requestors include:

- A rural official who wants funding sources to implement a community 911 emergency computer system.
- A state economic planner who needs information on leadership development and training for rural communities.
- A local government that requests information on youth crime prevention programs.
- An extension agent who requires information on community options if the local telephone provider disrupts or discontinues service.

Housing. Small communities, like their urban counterparts, face the often costly problem of providing affordable public housing for low-income citizens. As more and more elderly move to rural areas, local governments must also provide housing to meet the special needs of this as well as other special populations. Representative requestors include:

- A rural hotel owner who needs funding sources for renovating a hotel for elderly housing.

- A county extension agent who wants information on how to set up a home owners' cooperative for low-income families in a rural community.
- A local official who requests funding sources for rehabilitated housing for the handicapped.
- A local official who seeks information on the economic impact of developing an elderly housing project in the community.

Labor. Rural communities may face a struggling local economy, a corresponding high unemployment rate, and the continual problem of generating new jobs—some of which may require retraining for the local unemployed. Rural areas also encounter the economic impact of industrial plant relocations, dislocated workers, and military base closures. Representative requestors include:

- A local official who needs information on case studies and strategies to stimulate job growth after an Army ammunition plant closed.
- A nonprofit organization that requests private funding sources for job replacement and training and information on federal job training programs.
- A county extension agent who wants information on the labor market opportunities for youth in rural communities.
- A rural development group that desires information on the reintegration of homeless veterans into the work force.

Social Issues. Rural communities, like their urban counterparts, are constantly encountering changing and increasing social needs for their citizens. More recent social issues, such as how to deal with rising poverty and homelessness, youth alcohol and drug abuse, child abuse, battered women, and elderly care and services require new and often costly programs. These new services place additional financial stress on small communities that usually have a correspondingly small tax base. Representative requestors include:

- A philanthropic organization that wants information on rural poverty and hunger.
- A local official who requests information on funding sources for programs for drug-free youth groups.
- A community ministries group that needs funding sources for the homeless and a children's homeless shelter.
- A social worker who seeks information on the availability of battered women's services in rural areas.

Transportation. Elements that characterize many rural areas—vast space and distance, isolation, harsh weather conditions, natural resource barriers—generate numerous problems for local officials trying to meet the transportation needs of their citizens. Representative requestors include:

- An extension agent who wants information on alternatives to dirt roads.
- A local official who needs funding sources for upgrading the community's ground traffic control system.
- A state transportation official who requests information on transportation models applicable to rural areas.
- A community development organization that seeks information on funding sources for road repair and bridge rehabilitation.

Funding Requests

The rate of requests the Rural Information Center received for locating funding sources for local officials, rural communities, and citizens steadily increased from 16 percent in FY 1989 to 19 percent in 1990 and 1991, to 26 percent in 1992 and 1993, before it jumped to 35 percent in 1994. Rural communities and citizens call RIC to identify funding sources, to determine if they qualify for the funds, and to learn how they can apply for the funds. RIC provides this information from a variety of private, state, and federal online funding databases in addition to researching the center's large reference collection of funding source directories.

The funding request subject breakdown closely parallels the Rural Information Center's total annual subject breakdowns. For example, in FY 1994, 52 percent of all funding requests were health related, 26 percent were rural development, and 22 percent were in the remaining seven subject categories. This compares with the FY 1994 subject request breakdown of 50 percent for health, 32 percent for rural development, and 17 percent for the seven other subject categories (see Figure 2).

ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO RURAL INFORMATION

In 1991, the Rural Information Center established a RIC/RICHs sub-board to make rural information available electronically on ALF (Agriculture Library Forum), NAL's electronic bulletin board (301/504-6510). The sub-board contains a variety of information bulletins prepared by the RIC staff, including those on RIC/RICHs services; federal and state rural development resources; federal and private rural health grants; federal rural health legislation; and national, regional, and state rural development and health conferences. RIC also provides full-text access to its publications, which include funding resource directories, federal funding sources for local governments, tourism promotion, health funding sources, Native American health care, elderly, leadership development, affordable housing, and historic preservation to list a few.

In addition, RIC cooperates with other government agencies and organizations in loading additional rural information on the bulletin board, including the two RICHs publications funded by DHHS, *Rural Health Services Funding: A Resource Guide* and *Agricultural Safety and Health: A Resource Guide*; SBA's revised edition of *Working Together: A Guide to Federal*

and *State Resources for Rural Economic Development*; revised editions of the *Directory of Rural Studies Scholars and Educators* and *A Rural Studies Bibliography* (jointly produced by RIC and the National Rural Studies Committee [NRSC] located at the Western Rural Development Center); and the National Association of Development Organizations Research Foundation's (NADORF) newsletter, *Economic Development Digest*.

Beginning in August 1994, the Rural Information Center further expanded its rural information electronic dissemination effort when it loaded many of its ALF bulletin board electronic files on NAL's new Internet Gopher (gopher.nalusda.gov). At this time, NAL's Gopher did not have the capacity for RIC to provide full-text access to its printed publications. However, at the request of the White House and the Office of the Secretary of Agriculture, NAL did load RIC's most popular publication, *Federal Funding Sources for Rural Areas*.

After the NAL expanded the Gopher capacity in 1995, RIC loaded over thirty of its publications for Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman's six regional rural forums held throughout the country between April 17-24 and concluding on April 25 with President Bill Clinton's National Rural Conference in Ames, Iowa. USDA's Office of the Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education, and Economics sponsored a World Wide Web (WWW) server (<http://www.reeusda.gov/ruralconf>) for President Clinton's Conference and listed the Rural Information Center as the first USDA rural information resource provider featured on the server. The WWW server permits RIC users with access to a graphical WWW reader (such as Mosaic) to view a graphically enhanced version of its publications. In April, NAL initiated a WWW server (<http://www.nalusda.gov>) that also accesses RIC files.

The National Association of Community Action Agencies and the Rural Information Center received a grant from the USDA Forest Service and USDA's newly established Natural Resources Conservation Service, the former Soil Conservation Service, to research case studies of successful practices in limited resource communities. This public-private partnership will identify and compile innovative and successful community projects, strategies, programs, and other rural information materials, and broadly disseminate them for use by rural communities and community rural development practitioners. RIC will electronically disseminate the resources on both its ALF and Internet files.

CONGRESS AND PARTNERS STRENGTHEN RIC

State Partners

The Rural Information Center closely networks nationwide with four state-level offices and councils, including the Cooperative Extension Service, state offices of rural health, state libraries, and state rural development councils.

First, as previously mentioned, the Rural Information Center, as an Extension Service partner, networks closely with CES and has RIC State Extension Coordinators in all fifty states and Guam. During RIC's initial start-up between 1988 and 1989, the newly appointed coordinators participated in a RIC-conducted three-day workshop to enable them to become familiar with RIC services and rural development assistance capabilities before they implemented and promoted the RIC program in their states.

Second, RIC formally networks with the fifty SORHs and also maintains an ALF sub-board for the rural health offices to provide electronic networking and conferencing capabilities to meet their communication needs on professional issues.

Third, the Rural Information Center networks with more than half of the state libraries for the purpose of providing information assistance in meeting the information needs of rural libraries lacking access to specialized information requirements of their communities. RIC established this networking effort with the support and encouragement of the Rural Libraries Services Committee (RLSC) of the American Library Association at the January 1988 midwinter conference. RLSC felt that a network supporting rural libraries and based on the RIC State Extension Coordinator model would prove to be a valuable resource for rural libraries operating with limited staff, budget, and information resources.

Fourth, RIC networks with the State Rural Development Councils (SRDCs) established under the 1990 Presidential Initiative on Rural America with a council now existing in all fifty states. Each council is a collaborative partnership of federal, state, local, and tribal governments, and the private and nonprofit sector. The SRDCs' partnerships develop local solutions for rural economic development issues in their state. The federal government, in partnership with the National Governors' Association, began this rural initiative that grew into the National Rural Development Partnership and operates as councils at both the state and national level.

The SRDCs work closely with its federal counterpart, the National Rural Development Council (NRDC), which consists of senior program managers representing federal departments and agencies and national organizations. The NRDC, which includes the Rural Information Center, works on behalf of the SRDCs and provides partnership guidance at the national level.

In addition to these four formal national networking partnerships, the Rural Information Center has a long-standing cooperative effort with a state university—Clarion University of Pennsylvania and its Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship. RIC's effort is twofold. First, through cooperative agreements, Clarion University provides RIC with an average of three graduate library science interns annually. Each student usually

updates two RIC publications during his or her three-month internship. The interns also participate in NAL training courses on AGRICOLA, various software packages, and the Internet. They also experience reference work on either the main NAL reference desk or the RIC 800 toll-free desk. Second, RIC cosponsored, with Clarion University and others, three Information and Rural Development Conferences in 1988, 1991, and 1992.

USDA and Congressional Mandates

USDA support and congressional legislation also strengthen the Rural Information Center's program. In 1991, the Secretary of Agriculture established a department-wide rural revitalization task force to review USDA's rural nonfarm programs, identify factors affecting the performance of these programs, identify rural needs, and make recommendations on the department's future role in providing rural economic development. The task force concluded that USDA's programs, for the most part, do not promote any single strategy for developing rural areas and, in some cases, rural needs change faster than the programs are able to adapt to and keep pace with. The task force's report to the secretary proposed eighteen recommendations clarifying USDA's commitment to rural development, strengthening coordination among the rural programs, and improving USDA's ability to implement its rural programs. One of these eighteen recommendations was that USDA strengthen the resources of RIC (Rural Revitalization Task Force, 1989a, p. 27; Rural Revitalization Task Force, 1989b, pp. 7-8).

After considering this report, the cabinet-level White House Economic Policy Council Working Group on Rural Development, chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture Clayton Yeutter, also recommended that the federal government strengthen the Rural Information Center's resources and capabilities (President's Economic Policy Council, 1990, p. 17). Shortly after the release of the working group's report, President Bush ordered the implementation of his six-part Presidential Initiative on Rural America. The sixth initiative recommended providing a center to give technical assistance and detailed information on federal programs that service rural communities. This initiative was to take the form of an expansion of RIC and the participation of relevant federal agencies (U.S. Congress. Office of Technology Assessment, 1991, pp. 143, 149). In addition, a key RIC function was to provide toll-free access through an 800 telephone number.

Congress continued to expand the Rural Information Center's mandate as it examined rural economic problems. Both the *Rural Partnerships Act of 1989* (Title V, § 501) and the *Rural Business Link Promotion Act of 1989* (§ 3) authorized USDA to expand RIC's mandate to that of a National Rural Information Center Clearinghouse for the purpose of providing "information to local rural communities, nonmetropolitan coun-

ties, and rural areas concerning rural development matters and the availability of Federal rural development assistance" (*Rural Business Link Promotion Act of 1989*, 1989, § 4).

Congress also included the Rural Information Center's expanded mandate in the *Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990*, commonly called the 1990 Farm Bill. Congress directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a National Rural Information Center Clearinghouse at NAL and authorized \$500,000 in appropriations for each of fiscal years 1991 through 1995. The bill directed RIC to "provide and distribute information and data to any industry, organization, or Federal, State, or local government entity" and, when possible, to "use telecommunications technology to disseminate information to rural areas" (Title XXIII, § 2381). Congress further instructed RIC to make available to states for educational purposes its resources on rural health and safety information (§ 2390), to provide information to electric and telephone borrowers about useful and effective rural development efforts (§ 2343), and to provide, along with the Extension Service, information on federal, state, and private programs that provide training that increases the leadership abilities of rural residents (§ 2346).

Federal Partners

Since 1990, the Rural Information Center has been a focal point for federal cooperation and program expansion as a result of mandates from the President, Congress, and USDA. The involvement of USDA and other federal agencies reinforces RIC's national mandates. RIC continues to coordinate with USDA and other federal agencies with rural development programs to expand the program at the federal level through a variety of interagency funding agreements that enhance RIC's rural information delivery capabilities.

Besides the program support from DHHS for the RICHS program and the continuing cooperation with the Extension Service, RIC receives strong support from USDA's Office of the Under Secretary for Rural Economic and Community Development, formerly the Office of the Under Secretary on Small Community and Rural Development. At the direction of the Under Secretary's Office, the former Farmers Home Administration transferred a funded staff position to RIC in 1992 for the purpose of hiring a librarian; the Under Secretary's Office continues to support this position through a collaborative multiagency funding arrangement. Also, since 1992, the Forest Service transferred funds for RIC's part-time staffing positions and publications program.

INFORMATION OUTREACH

In brief, rural officials and citizens need relevant, accurate, and timely information for identifying strategies for diversifying their economies, for assisting in making decisions, for providing guidance in allocating resources, for using their ingenuity, and for setting their horizons (Myers,

1987, p. 7). Requestors—rural citizens seeking information, new ideas, and/or funding sources for any topic imaginable—demonstrate their needs by the great variety of questions RIC receives, the responses to which they hope will help sustain their communities.

Because of this need, the Rural Information Center will continue to extend its outreach efforts and the availability of its services to the grassroots level of rural America. RIC will continue expanding its efforts to add the information most important to rural officials and communities on its ALF and Internet files. RIC will also continue its cooperative efforts with other federal and state agencies, national organizations, and public-private partnerships to acquire information resources that it may load on both the Agriculture Library Forum and the Internet. RIC hopes that, in addition to its current information delivery services, its efforts to increase the amount of information available electronically for rural communities will contribute to narrowing the information gap between urban and rural citizens as more and more rural communities are able to connect to electronic sources such as ALF and the Internet.

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The Library and Wired Communities in Rural Areas

STEVE CISLER

ABSTRACT

THE FUTURE OF LIBRARIES in rural areas of the United States is tied to the future of the communities which they serve. As the telecommunications landscape continues to shift, these communities have opportunities to decrease their isolation, increase their connectedness, and affect the overall health of small towns and even whole regions through the innovative use of new technologies and new regulatory structures. By understanding the options, the changes in technologies, and the funding sources to help start and sustain some of these projects, those librarians who help serve rural communities will also strengthen their own position in the community and in the profession.

THE PAST

Because it is more expensive to build infrastructure in rural areas than in towns, rural libraries have usually lagged behind urban and suburban libraries in their ability to adopt computer and networking technologies. This was true for something even more basic: electricity.

Most librarians assume that electricity is a given, something not to worry about (except the bills), but this basic technology reached some rural areas of the United States less than forty years ago, many decades after the urban areas were using it. Nye (1990), the Danish historian who wrote about the social effects of the spread of electricity in the United States, observed that America treated electricity as a commodity in the marketplace, whereas in Europe it was treated as a service that was frequently subsidized and supported through government intervention. In

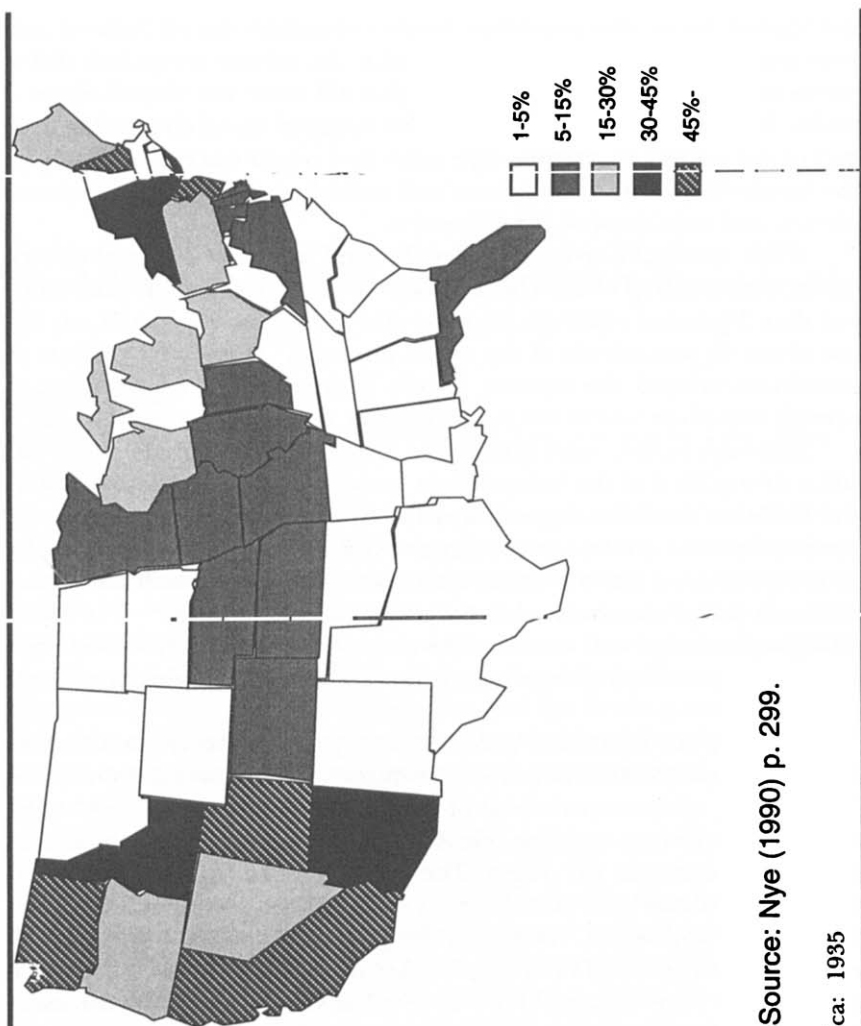
the United States, the municipal power companies stayed isolated and were unable to grow in the same way that the private companies did—across counties and state lines. While this did make the United States a leader in world electrical production (we bragged about consuming over half of the world's electricity), Nye notes that power was concentrated in the hands of a few powerful firms and individuals, there was little rural service, and rates favored big customers.

While much of Europe and New Zealand had near universal electrical service, the map of the United States in 1935 shows many states with less than 5 percent coverage for rural electrical subscribers, and any figure above 45 percent was at the top of the scale. There were pockets of innovation around the country, usually in the form of cooperatives to provide electricity where the big companies would not go (see Figure 1).

Although people were leaving the farm in large numbers, there was still a strong ideal of the independent home farm, and the depression of the 1930s led the federal government to try to lessen the growing gap in electrical service on the farm and in the city. Farmers had been exposed to the wonders of electric lights, water pumps, milking machines, irons, and even butter churns for decades of county and state fairs. The labor-saving aspects were well known to the men and women in rural areas, but it still took years and government programs to bring electricity to rural areas.

In 1933, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) was created and, in 1935, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) was established. The TVA was the more controversial of the two, and we are not likely to see any parallel effort to establish telecommunications projects in an area of the United States in the 1990s. The REA's goal to bring electricity to farms also boosted local economies by creating jobs and stimulating sales of electrical appliances. However, the power companies responded by dragging their feet and installing "snake" or "spite" lines in their service areas. These were electrical lines targeted at small pockets of customers that bypassed more isolated ones, and this tactic tended to inhibit the formation of cooperatives. By 1941, 12,000 schools received electricity. By 1946, about 50 percent of the farms had been wired.

At the local level, enthusiastic novices had a great impact. Clark Woody, a schoolteacher turned farmer, could not afford the fee to hook up his property, so he hopped in a car with some friends, drove from Indiana to Washington, met with REA officials, returned home, organized a cooperative, and got one of the first REA loans. In 1936, the *Lebanon Reporter* put out a thirty-two page supplement that contained all the basic information farmers needed to make decisions about electricity. This "electricity FAQ" was so popular with readers, that the copies printed were more than twice the average circulation of the paper.



Source: Nye (1990) p. 299.

Figure 1. Electricity in rural America: 1935

The REA involved politicians in project ceremonies, and even Franklin Roosevelt dedicated a cooperative in Warm Springs, Georgia, in 1938. The saying that "all politics are local" was borne out because Roosevelt was shocked to see the high electrical rates when he first came to Warm Springs in the 1920s. He wrote: "That started my long study of proper public-utility charges for electrical current and the whole subject of getting electricity into farm homes" (Nye, 1990, p. 324).

The history of the rural development of electricity is important because it parallels much of what is happening with the spread (or lack thereof) of telecommunications in urban and rural areas in our own time. There are some important differences, too. The futurists and utility companies tended to exaggerate the benefits of electricity more than has been done with telecommunications and the Internet in this decade, aside from some writers such as George Gilder. Thomas Edison thought electricity would eliminate sleep, and magazines such as *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science* extrapolated from reports about electrical experiments to announce the radio transmission of electrical power (eliminating long extension cords for electric airplanes), electromagnetic levitation devices and solar electric power "just around the corner." *Science Wonder Stories* published "City of the Living Dead" "where machines not only do all the work but provide synthetic experience to many citizens who are permanently wired to a 'vast library of recorded adventures'" (Nye, 1990, p. 343).

In spite of this hype, electricity was revolutionary, and we must understand some of the changes in computer and networking technology to comprehend what form the revolution may take in the 1990s.

THE BIG CHANGES

Big technological changes are happening, and all of these will affect users in rural areas if only because they are denied access to the options many urban users will have. There will continue to be relentless progress in hardware and software. CPU power will continue to double about every eighteen months so that designers can look ahead and know the approximate time that a feature on an expensive machine will be added to a consumer-priced device. The assumption is that the features of these powerful devices will be so attractive that the market will increase and the economies of scale will increase to lower the price of components. What is not changing as fast is the speed of the networks that link up these ever faster, ever cheaper Power Macs, Pentiums, and Unix machines. ISDN (Integrated Services Digital Network) has been around since the 1970s and is only now being tariffed for home use. Ethernet is nominally 10 mbps and has not changed for many years. Modem speeds are climbing, and prices are dropping drastically, but most modems in use are still 2400 bps. Certainly, many enterprises are planning faster networks using Asynchronous Transfer Mode (ATM), but rural areas may not benefit from this technology for a long time.

In software, there are four important changes: (1) digital compression; (2) intelligent agents; (3) better navigation tools; and (4) user configurable software. Digital compression is already used in many cases—e.g., to compress a text file, a photograph, or other binary file. Sophisticated compression techniques will allow full motion video to run over medium speed transmission media and will make high resolution images available over medium speed modems. Because of the lure of profits from movies on demand, considerable engineering efforts are being expended on the problems and challenges of digital compression, decompression, and transmission. Many people believe that the services for the public good (education, libraries, and health) will ride the coattails of such entertainment services.

Intelligent agents are far off, but semi-intelligent agents that carry out repetitive tasks are already being used in different products. AppleSearch is a text-retrieval system for dynamic and static sources of information that uses “reporters” to search databases and then compose the answers into newspapers that are displayed on the desktop at a set time each day. At the 1994 Apple Library Users Group meeting in Miami, Florida, Bonnie Nardi, an anthropologist who works in the Apple Advanced Technology Group, reported on her study of the Apple Library reference services and found the complexity of the reference interview indicated that the human factor would not be replaced by software agents for the foreseeable future.

If anyone has attempted to search DIALOG in the past or navigate around the Internet, you are aware of the problems, especially for untrained novices, in finding your way on the Internet, and the challenge of doing more than serendipitous browsing of Internet sources is one that is being answered by various software firms, universities, and individual programmers. Recently, Apple Computer decided to recognize the efforts of the programmers who had provided a wide spectrum of navigation tools without thought of monetary reward. In September 1994, Apple announced the Cool Tools Awards for Internet programs.

User configurable software allows the nonprogrammer to control and adjust a program to the same degree that a professional programmer could. Some tools and languages, such as HyperTalk and Visual Basic, indicate that many people will become programmers if the barriers are lowered to learning the language. In the future, the decision to modify a program will be part of using the software, not an extra leap after an investment in hundreds of hours of learning a new language. Through document architectures such as OpenDoc and Microsoft's OLE 2.0, developers are making the computing experience for the end-user much more flexible and customizable. Some of the new computing technologies make little sense for rural areas without a telecommunications infrastructure, and the gap between those who can use them and those who cannot or do not use them will continue to grow.

TECHNOLOGY CHOICES FOR RURAL AREAS

During the past year, I have become convinced that communications technology is much less important to the survival of a rural community than are the people and the policies that they put in place to deal with the challenges they face. Technologists frequently forget this. I am much indebted to the recently deceased Kenneth Wilkinson, a rural sociologist from Penn State University. His unpublished 1992 paper, "Community Development in an Information Society," has had a sobering effect on my approaches to rural telecommunications and community networking projects. He sees the challenge as being the ways new technologies are used to reverse community deterioration. In fact, he says that rural communities are rarely that: "[R]ural places tend to be locations where particular problems and issues appear and not social units where effective collective actions occur." (The inequality among local groups, lack of services and organizational structures, and uneven access to outside resources "undermine local capacity for collective action and self-help." He recognizes that a lot of the problems are caused by forces outside the community—i.e., within the national economy and political structure. One of the big changes from sixty years ago, as electricity was coming into these communities, is that physical isolation is now associated more with social isolation than with social cohesion.

We also see the increasingly fast movement of capital into and out of given geographic areas. Companies look for the best investment climate reflected in wage rates, level of education, and tax breaks from state or local governments. While a state with a low wage scale and weak trade unions may attract a factory or distribution warehouse in one year, another state or even another country may attract that same firm a few years later. It is difficult for small communities to be flexible enough to react positively to such disruptive movements.

A number of writers, including contributors to an Office of Technology Assessment (U.S. Congress, OTA, 1991) report, believe that networking technology offers some ways of fostering community development and perhaps reversing the downward slide of small towns and counties. *Rural America at the Crossroads: Networking for the Future* was issued by the OTA in April 1991. As with many of their reports, general readers from different fields only hear about their studies after they are out of print. However, OTA is running a gopher, and I have requested that the OTA report be disseminated in digital format if the agency survives budget cuts going on in 1995. The study looked at new technologies for rural areas, the kinds of communities that could make use of them, how to help rural areas get the technologies shortly after the urban areas do, what role the federal government can take, and how rural America can be competitive in a world of NAFTA agreements and mobile international markets.

There are two important trends that they observed and described. Now, more than three years later, we are seeing the results of those trends. The first is the deregulation of the telephone system, the increase in competition, and the resulting "undermining [of] the traditional system of rate averaging and subsidies for local telephone service" (U.S. Congress, OTA, 1991, p. 8). In the past, the goal of universal service, though never achieved, was not that different for a business or for a single mother living in a trailer park. Now, the variety of services offered, as well as the competition in more profitable parts of the marketplace, has weakened the monopoly status of some Bell telephone companies.

In Colorado, a number of rural telephone routes owned by US West were sold in 1993; other sales are pending. The company had several goals in mind: invest in more profitable overseas markets, pay off the debt for the investment in Time Warner, and dump the less profitable rural services. Because of the economy in California, there was a huge migration of new settlers into Colorado and, according to *The Rocky Mountain News* (Holmes, 1994), US West could not meet routine telephone requests all around the state, let alone requests for more sophisticated services such as Switched 56 (dedicated 56 kbps lines) in towns such as Telluride (p. 104).

WHAT IS THE TELLURIDE INFOZONE TRYING TO DO, BUILD A RURAL AREA NETWORK (RAN)?

The RAN, a term coined by the authors of the OTA report, is formed around geographic boundaries rather than a single business or function, and it links as many types of users in a community as is possible: schools, libraries, businesses, government offices, health clinics, and even individuals who want to publish information within the community or on the worldwide Internet.

Telluride is an unusual town in an unusual setting. Everything is high—land prices, rentals, and even the altitude. They claim the highest per capita of computer ownership of any town in the United States, and the income is extremely high, so many other towns of equal size discount some of the lessons that Telluride is learning with the InfoZone project. As a starting point, they are using a Macintosh-based bulletin board system called FirstClass to allow citizens to discuss local issues, send mail (also to the Internet), and plan other steps as they improve the links to the outside world. In 1993, the Colorado Advanced Technology Institute awarded Telluride the funds to establish an Internet point of presence (POP) with Colorado Supernet. The Apple Library of Tomorrow program granted the InfoZone project (including the Telluride Public Library) a number of machines and printers for public access sites around town, including the library, schools, and Telluride Institute offices.

Getting the phone lines in town to the Internet router from these sites was not possible with US West. They could not provide the lines, so the InfoZone organizers are working with Tetherless Access Ltd. of Fremont, California, to install spread spectrum radio transceivers to form a wireless "mesh" network of Macintoshes that connects to the Cisco router and to the 56 kb line to the Internet.

Spread spectrum is a radio technology that was developed for military purposes, and now it is finding its way into lower cost devices that permit sites as much as thirteen miles apart (line-of-sight) to communicate at 56 kbps or faster. It uses special antennas, license-free transmitters that are under one watt in power, and certain classes of users (radio amateurs) can run the transmitters at higher power and push the range to more than 100 miles in any direction. Some firms are offering this wireless network at speeds of 4 megabits per second over a 2.5 mile range. While this technology can be used legally in all parts of the United States, it may be prohibited (or, at least, not well understood) in many other countries. The challenge of a decentralized technology that bypasses a government-controlled telephone system is a considerable threat to a weak central government. In 1985, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in the United States permitted the unlicensed use of spread spectrum technology. Tetherless Access, Ltd.'s (one of several manufacturers) World Wide Web server states the advantages:

The FCC's ruling, contained in Part 15.247 of its Rules and Regulations, was intended to stimulate the widespread commercial use of spread spectrum technology. It is used as a lever by the FCC to extend the economic benefits of deregulation to use of the radio spectrum. The fact that a user can operate without first obtaining an FCC license is a significant breakthrough in the use of radio systems. It provides a strong incentive to choose spread spectrum over conventional radio technology. No longer does the user have to perform costly and time-consuming frequency planning and coordination to ensure that a new radio installation will not interfere with existing radio links.¹

Tetherless Access Ltd. is also working with the nonprofit organization Volunteers in Technical Assistance in Arlington, Virginia, to blend spread spectrum and low speed satellite data communications for store-and-forward electronic mail in rural areas of the United States and developing countries without a good telecommunications infrastructure. For more information, contact Dewayne Hendricks <dewayne@warpspeed.com> or see the VITA gopher server.² VITA planned to launch a nongeosynchronous satellite in 1995, which will pass over each part of the earth anywhere from three times a day at the equator to fifteen times a day at the poles. During each pass, high speed modems can send batches of mail or files to the satellite for distribution

elsewhere on the orbit. While this can provide very limited interactivity with gopher or World Wide Web services by e-mail, it does provide electronic communications at a relatively low price for remote areas.

In the future, various for-profit and nonprofit firms want to launch networks of low earth orbiting satellites (LEOS) that will provide complete coverage for portable devices anywhere on earth—at a price. Naturally, a nonprofit organization, such as VITA, hopes to keep the price low to foster communications and information flow for the have-not nations, peoples, and organizations in the world. According to Gary Garriott <garyg@vita.org> of VITA, a solar-powered ground station with service policy will sell for about \$2,700, and they are trying to determine the price of message traffic for the new service. This sort of service is most suited to rural locations with no telephone service nearby. A ground station allows remote libraries (or individuals in the field) to upload and download files during the times when the satellite passes over the site.

There is a growing interest in a wire- and fiber-based service known as Frame Relay.³ This is a switching architecture for computer networks that is being offered as a commercial service by all of the regional Bell companies and GTE in parts of thirty states. The costs vary greatly, depending on what tariff has been established by the Public Utilities Commission and the phone company, but Pacific Bell in California is offering a service that permits a library system with branches all over a large county, for example, to connect to the Frame Relay cloud⁴ rather than lease separate lines. What is most important for rural libraries is that they pay a flat rate for unlimited use and do not pay more when one site is further away than another. At present, a 56 kilobit per second line costs \$125 per month, and speeds of 128 kbps, 384 kbps, and 1.544 megabits per second (T1) are available. T1 costs \$663 per month. There are installation charges and other fees, but it can offer a great price break for librarians planning networks.

Michael Schuyler (1994) of Kitsap Regional Library in Bremerton, Washington, is among the first library network administrators to make use of Frame Relay in public libraries. In the publication *LinkNet User's Manual*, Schuyler explains in some detail his rationale for choosing this technology. It makes very good sense for libraries building community networks to which a variety of information providers may connect directly to feed information to the network. It is interesting to note the different charges for the library adding another connection or by purchasing it from one of the three phone companies that serve Kitsap County. The monthly charges range from \$92 to \$237 and, if you have access to the service in your area, the prices may fall somewhere in that wide range. LinkNet's user manual is available on their gopher (linknet.kitsap.lib.wa.us Port 70) in the Linknet Support directory as "userman1.asc."

Most rural libraries should look to their state library for assistance in keeping up with the latest technology that makes sense in rural areas. In preparing this article, rural library and automation experts were interviewed from state agencies in Alaska, Idaho, Illinois, Kentucky, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Washington. In addition, I spoke with network and telecomms workers in California, Colorado, Indiana, Nebraska, and West Virginia.

The participants were asked a series of questions about the state of rural libraries and communities, what technologies are particularly exciting to rural libraries, exemplary projects involving libraries, as well as training options for isolated staff (both MLS and non-MLS workers).

The state of the libraries varied greatly. Lou Reinwand of the Utah State Library was the most upbeat in his assessment of his state's rural libraries. The economy is fair, Californians and retirees are pouring in, and the state's own efforts to certify libraries and provide money for equipment and materials has made an impact. In other states, budget cuts are undercutting years of building up of adequate services of all types to rural areas. The most extreme example is South Dakota, whose state library was slated to close in mid-November 1994 because of a funding battle between the legislature and the governor.

One state specifically mentioned stand-alone CD-ROMs as being a very exciting technology for rural libraries. Those of us in urban areas with many connectivity options must realize that, until decent bandwidth reaches rural areas, CD-ROMs will deliver more information than low grade phone systems can in many locations. However, most states mentioned access to the Internet as the hot topic, as are community networks in many locations. In late 1994, the Colorado State Library was awarded a large Department of Education grant for a very ambitious networking project that will extend the Access Colorado Library Information Network. Funding for Internet connections in rural areas elsewhere is coming from LSCA, private companies, foundations, and other agencies of the federal government, such as the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Rural Utilities Service.

NEW ROLES FOR LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

Some librarians ask me to help define their role in this rapidly changing techno-climate. There are some general guidelines that may need to be modified for your specific situation. As stated earlier, the health of libraries is tied to the communities they serve. For this reason, I have been interested, in the past few years, in ensuring that libraries are involved in the community networks that are forming in cities and towns all around the country. For a general introduction, see "Community Computer Networks: Building Electronic Greenbelts."⁵ Some librarians involved may not know as much as other organizers about computers or

networks, but they know about organizing information, about helping users find it, and they know the community. Of course, many librarians know a great deal about all of those topics, but the point is that each librarian and each library can bring something to the table when a community decides that it wants to be better connected. Computer expertise is not necessarily a requirement.

The most basic role the library can assume is to serve as a meeting place for a group that is planning such a network or system. You may have no computer, you may never have used a network, but you can offer your meeting room or even your reading room after hours for initial meetings. I have attended town meetings in library meeting rooms, and it is a definite benefit to have the public associate the formation of the planning group with the library. Another role is that of facilitator. The librarian can suggest that interested parties meet to discuss changes in networks and telecommunications in their town or county. Even if the library uses no technology, the librarian should be the one to invite representatives from the cable company, cellular service, telephone company, local BBS system operators, the school, city, and perhaps even the power company. Find someone who has something to say or demonstrate and invite that person to speak. It may be an outsider, but look locally for talent before inviting others (even those who will come for free) to initial meetings. What does this do for the library? You are the one who got people together and began the dialogue. People will associate you and your library with change, with foresight. Too often I have seen talented librarians not hear about these meetings or conferences until all the arrangements have been made or until they are over. Do not let people at any level forget you or the library.

If the dialogue has already begun, as it has in many states and many towns (the lieutenant governor of Colorado held local meetings on telecomms issues in various towns around the state, for example), find out how you can help. Ensure that people know the prospective role of the library—organizer, participant, meeting place. If you are reluctant to make a public presentation, find a librarian who can. That person may be in the regional library, the state library, or someone already involved in such a project who speaks at meetings and conferences.

Some states, such as Illinois, offer workshops on community involvement. The Small Library Management Institute, organized by the Illinois State Library, is a good example of the kind of training that goes beyond basic reference and circulation and interlibrary loan essentials (which are quite necessary) to providing the skills needed to become more involved in your town.

When communities decide that they want an improved telecommunications infrastructure, they usually do so because they have a specific use in mind. However, some may do it because the county seat thirty miles

away began some project, and the neighboring town does not want to be left behind. The most frequently mentioned applications are usually voiced in sensible, but rather vague, scenarios: "Let's hook up the schoolrooms, put the hospital online, have the city council minutes for people to read, help the ranchers get agricultural information from the extension agent, and look up the library holdings in an electronic catalog." Or it might be simply, "We need an onramp to the Internet." Few people will come out and say: "I'm anxiously awaiting pay-per-view so I won't have to drive to the video store."

You, as the librarian, can help. Bring a few articles or news items that describe a system that might be a model for your area. Most meetings include people who have read about these changes, those who are using the new technologies, those who want to sell them to you, and perhaps some who are worried about the changes that will take place if your organizing group is successful. If you have the resources to talk or even interview people in your community, spend as much time as you can involving and informing others. Offer to distribute the survey at the library; post the meeting minutes on your bulletin board and help get the word out.

After a few meetings—perhaps at the first one—the group will examine the potential applications. There will be members who are focused on the technology and others who are better at relating to the people they hope to serve. It is recommended that nobody build special purpose networks. The OTA report emphasizes multiple uses for the network, so do not plan on just one for schools, or libraries, or telemedicine, or economic development. People who control money in Washington are calling these "stovepipe" networks, and they are less inclined to fund these than in the past. They are tired of hearing people say, We need funds for this library network, even though the hospitals and junior colleges around the state may have just built one. It is obvious that many of these networks will emphasize one type of application over another, and it is up to libraries to see how they can participate in the project and help the collaborators.

The National Association of Development Organizations⁶ is a non-profit organization that assists rural economic development councils, government officials, and nonprofit organizations in sharing information and ideas. Their research organization published a white paper, "Telecommunications and Its Impact on Rural America."⁷ The concerns their members have and the trends they hope to encourage are similar to those of rural libraries. Because the range of projects is so wide, only two examples will be given.

In McAllen, Texas, near the Mexican border, the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council realized that there was a problem with arbitrary long distance calling areas in the three counties served by GTE and Southwestern Bell. It took two years, but the council helped citizens in the area obtain an optional \$25 per month charge for unlimited calls

over an extended calling area that stretches about 120 miles. This flat fee over such a large area is of obvious benefit to a library establishing connections with outlying libraries for network or fax traffic, but also to schools, nonprofit organizations, and county government. Not only are monthly bills less, but the library has the beginnings of a telecommunications infrastructure where everyone has relatively low cost but broad access. Any time such a plan is proposed, testimony from libraries can help make the case for such a change in the rules.

The Bethel Distance Delivery Consortium⁸ in Bethel, Alaska, is a consortium of KYUK, a PBS station; several school districts; and a hospital corporation that encompasses fifty-two villages, some of them over 150 miles from Bethel, which itself is far from Anchorage and is accessible only by dogsled and plane. They are using a FirstClass⁹ BBS to link up participants involved in distance education and telemedicine. At present, they use a very expensive satellite for 2400 bps access among villages at a cost of \$25 per hour, but dedicated lines and new wireless connections could provide the connectivity for new multimedia services. Many of the improvements they are planning are made possible by a \$500,000 grant from the Rural Electrification Administration, a federal entity that funds new technology to improve rural delivery of health care and distance education. Although no library is involved in this project, it is the very sort that libraries could ally themselves with during the planning stages and not after the grant is awarded.

At the 1994 conference for small and rural libraries held in Bismarck, North Dakota, the provincial librarian for Manitoba mentioned that people in rural parts of the province were calling and asking if the library was going to provide Internet access. These were areas where no group was supporting a library, but some users' desire for electronic information and communications should enable a few communities to leapfrog over the predominantly print-based rural library and connect directly to the Internet. One state library employee predicted that marginal rural libraries would shut down as rural inhabitants had their information needs met by commercial (or perhaps government subsidized) network services. It is time to examine the library's role in providing these services, perhaps even if there is no building or part-time staff in the area where potential users live.

Even if libraries do not have the resources to become a network provider, the roles of trainer and online support staff are already being taken by some libraries. Helen Moeller, director of the Leon County Public Library System in Tallahassee, Florida, is guiding the training efforts for Internet users in the town. Each month there are several training sessions, and the demand for this grows along with the interest in network access.

Another option that can be considered is to allow the library building to serve as a holding site for telecommunications equipment. The security, accessibility, and centrality of many library buildings may make them ideal locations for routers, terminal access points, and other back room equipment.

Finally, I have not encountered any community network operation that did not want to have the library participate. The Santa Fe Public Library¹⁰ in New Mexico has a World Wide Web page that is hosted by a small commercial firm that is planning to offer Internet access in that part of the state. Having library information online lends it some stature, and guest accounts for the staff can generate good word of mouth advertising.

CONCLUSION

This article has tried to show how slowly some popular technologies have spread in rural areas as well as discussing some new technologies that will affect rural areas, if only because they do not have them and the urban areas do (this happened with electricity a century ago). Finally, the new roles for libraries and librarians included examples of collaborative projects and efforts where librarians were involved or could have been, even if they were absent. What works in rural Texas may not apply to North Dakota or the villages of rural Alaska. Potential causes, grant partners, and network collaborators will vary, but individual efforts to reach out, learn more, become involved, and offer the best services your library can manage will win friends, support, prestige, and perhaps an important place in the growing web of networks.

NOTES

- ¹ <http://www.tetherless.net/> is the URL for Tetherless Access, Ltd. World Wide Web pages.
- ² <gopher://vita.org/>
- ³ Frame Relay Forum home page: <http://frame-relay.indiana.edu>
- ⁴ Cloud, in network terms, is a concept that indicates the reach of a network and is usually drawn as a cloud in diagrams. Pacific Bell's Frame Relay cloud in California reaches all over the state. The Internet cloud reaches more than eighty countries. The idea is that by connecting to the cloud, you have access to all other parties connecting to the cloud.
- ⁵ Available by anonymous ftp from: <ftp.apple.com> in the <alug/communet> directory
- ⁶ NADO, 444 N. Capitol St. NW, Suite 630, Washington, DC 20001. (202) 624 7806
- ⁷ April 1994. Available from NADO. \$10 for nonmembers.
- ⁸ Contact Jim Schaefer at: Jim_Schaefer@ddc-alaska.org, Distance Delivery Consortium, P.O. Box 2401, Bethel, AK 99559 (907) 543-4069, FAX (907) 543-3130.
- ⁹ SoftArc Inc. 905/415-7000.
- ¹⁰ <http://spy.org:70/0/Users/sfpublib/html/sfpublib.html>

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Pathways to Tomorrow's Service: The Future of Rural Libraries

GLEN E. HOLT

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE IS AN EXAMINATION of the forces and trends, the imperatives and the options, affecting the future of rural libraries. It explores shifts in rural library constituencies, the varied factors—including funding and staffing—affecting their ability to deliver service, critical technological developments, and changing customer expectations. If rural libraries are to have a bright future, the staff and trustee leaders of rural library districts will have to grapple with these issues.

THE STATE OF RURAL LIBRARIES

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, . . . it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of Light, . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its nosiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

This beautifully woven tapestry of contrasting words that opens Charles Dickens' 1859 novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, is an appropriate starting point for an examination of the future of rural libraries. For, no library-related topic provokes greater difference of opinion than the current situation and future prospects of rural libraries.

On the one hand, a recent survey of libraries serving thirty-four Connecticut communities, most with under 25,000 patrons (Welch & Donohue, 1994, pp. 149-51), suggests that they do not need much change. When asked why they did not visit their local libraries, nonusers provided no "reasons that might be construed as reflecting library deficiencies, such as inadequate facilities, poor services, etc." Rather, nonusers stated that they did not have time or simply were not in the habit of using the library. The study concluded that, while schools needed to do a better job of getting students into the "library habit," rural libraries were doing a good job in meeting the needs of their users.

A far different picture is painted in a recent national survey executed by the Center for Rural Libraries at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. In one report from the study, Vavrek (1990) concludes: "There is a gap between the daily information needs of rural residents and the ability of the [rural] library to satisfy those needs" (p. 2).

As major reasons for nonuse, those surveyed stated "a lack of transportation," "being physically unable," and "not being sure of what is at the library." And new services were wanted: 70 percent of users and 30 percent of nonusers asked for "computerized information," "job training," "books on tape," and "activities for senior Americans."

Although most Clarion University study respondents regarded rural libraries as popular reading places, only 20 percent listed their public library as a place to obtain "current" information. The rural library ranked behind asking a professional or asking a friend or relative as the best source for up-to-date information (Vavrek, 1993, p. i).

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of Light. . . .

This article examines the changes in rural libraries which have produced such contrasts. These changes include shifts in rural library constituencies, the varied factors affecting their ability to deliver service, critical technological developments, and changing customer expectations. If rural libraries are to have a bright future, their leaders will have to grapple with all of these issues.

THE CHALLENGE OF RURAL CHANGE

Decades ago, the steam engine and the railroad began to erode the edges of rural isolation. In recent decades, more modern transportation (the automobile and the motor truck) and communication technology (telegraph, telephone, radio, and television) accelerated the process.

The new technological implements connected cities, suburbs, edge cities, exurbia, satellite cities, farm-to-market towns, and crossroads hamlets. The resulting blur of settlement often became so indistinct that even scholars found it difficult to decide where one kind of settlement ended and another one began.

As this process continued, it upset traditional institutions and ways of life. The rural Kansas town of Elmo, where my parents resided when I was born, no longer exists. Shiloh, the rural church near Chilhowee, Missouri, where my father's parents worshiped, stands abandoned; only the size of the nearby grown-over cemetery marks the site's importance to long-gone generations. My mother's parents' rural farmhouse in south Dickinson County, Kansas, is now a ripple in a wheat field. Only a solitary tree growing through the broken boards of an old well cover marks its former place. The Dayton Township School, where my father began teaching farm children at the onset of the Great Depression, is a fenced-in knoll covered with tall prairie grass.

Market town, rural church, country school, and agricultural homestead—the cornerstones of early-modern American rural culture—have not withstood the upheavals of industrial-age job swings, the ease of modern transportation and communications, and changing family lifestyles.

As we approach the millennium, the information-age twins of computers and networks hasten the disruptive processes. The pressures on rural institutions increase. There is only one good response and that is change.

An August 21, 1994, editorial in *The Wichita Beacon* (New Times section) put the issue this way: "Rural Kansas is not dying. It is changing. . . . Areas that can't, or won't, accommodate change surely will wither away....[And unfortunately] the one thing many rural communities most fear is change; thus they fear the very thing that can save them" (p. 16A).

This paper's editorial summarizes the critical mandate for rural libraries: They must change. Rural locales and their people are changing, and rural libraries must change to keep up. Unless they change, they face the threat of irrelevancy.

CHANGE IN RURAL POPULATIONS

Reflecting their locations within the nation, rural populations are varied and shifting (Ford, 1994, pp. 30-31). In general, the population of rural sections of the United States has grown since 1950 but more slowly than for metropolitan areas. The generalization masks a huge variance, from intensive exurban growth booms to decades of depopulation, that have left particular rural landscapes barren of people.

In northern Missouri, for example, ramshackle abandoned farmsteads thrust up here and there out of the meager soil. Nearby, little farm-to-market towns lay dead or dying. In the state's Upper Ozarks rural southwest, meanwhile, there is a growth boom fed by new tourism, heavily-marketed country music, and occasional new factories. The Missouri rural boom depopulation contrast can be found in almost every state.

The age of rural inhabitants shows the same variation. Rural population is both older and younger than metropolitan areas, characteristics strengthened by out-migration of the young in search of jobs and in-

migration of the elderly looking for inexpensive places to retire. The only spots where similar age contrasts exist are in old central cities, where nearly any in-migration is youthful while the elderly almost always constitute the most settled residents. Youthful leave-taking has been a painful fact for long decades of rural history. *The Wichita Beacon* editorial warns: "Smaller communities must stop exporting their talent to the cities" (*Rural Kansas...*, 1994, p. 16A). But few areas have been able to halt the generations-long farm-to-city exodus.

A lack of well-paid jobs drives much of the rural out-migration. Less than 10 percent of rural populations still work in agriculture; more than 50 percent of all employment is in services. Almost always, in recent decades, the journey to work involves long distances—from one rural community to another or to a nearby city or metropolitan area.

My home town of Abilene, Kansas, current population 7,000, is a good example of small town and rural job realities. For decades the town lived off the legend of 1870s Sheriff "Wild Bill" Hickock and, more recently, the tourism associated with the Dwight D. Eisenhower birthplace, museum, and library. Recently, Abilene recruited a new 400-job candy factory. Suddenly the real estate market has consequence, and new small businesses are dusting off the shelves in long-vacant stores.

The average annual family income derived from rural jobs is a few thousand dollars less than that for metropolitan area families. As with other statistical indicators, however, the range is more revealing than the average. Some rural families live in the same disastrous poverty as do the residents of big city slums; other families enjoy considerable prosperity.

In a housing survey this author completed in Pontiac, Illinois, in 1968, one impoverished family was found residing in a chicken coop even though the town had just recruited three new industrial plants. That type of contrast is typical to anyone who frequents rural towns.

Education levels on average are not as good as for metropolitan areas, but they are not as low as for families who reside in the poor illiterate enclaves dotting every urban landscape. And, as with the city, the reason for literacy problems are as much matters of local and state government policy as they are consequences of poverty.

In Missouri, some relatively poor districts are using distance-education classes delivered over an educational television station to educate "isolated" rural children. In some other wealthier close-to-city districts, schools sometimes cannot afford current textbooks much less a computer in a classroom or school media center.

The population characteristics of rural America make it a surrogate for the variety of the nation as a whole. As such, it raises the same questions for the leaders of rural libraries as those who watch over the fortunes of other public libraries.

Who will be served? What services will be provided? What special efforts will the library make to serve its critical constituencies, including its weakest groups? And, in the management of its services, how will the institution maintain its strong base of supporters? Who will shoulder the burden of maintaining public funding?

The answers to these questions are never simple. For all kinds of reasons, discussed in later sections of this article, these questions are harder now and are especially hard for rural libraries.

CRITICAL RURAL LIBRARY CONSTITUENCIES

One measure of the future of any public library is found in how it serves its critical constituencies. These market groups include its traditional strong customers, the community's fastest growing populations, those who are helping build and sustain the area economy, and its most dependent populations. In its service to critical constituencies, each public library makes its case for continued and/or expanded community funding.

In assessing its pathway to the future, each rural library needs to consider how to serve its critical constituencies. Because of rural demographics and economic changes, four groups are especially critical.

Women: The Traditional Rural Library Constituency

A recent survey found that women comprise 70 percent of rural library users. The typical woman user is a forty-four-year-old high school graduate. She is a "homemaker" who makes weekly visits to the library, which she perceives as a familiar and comfortable place. Typically she stays six to fifteen minutes, principally borrowing best-sellers for herself. She also drops in for equally short stays to use the copier, fax machine, or telephone (Vavrek, 1990, pp. 2-3, 21-25). Rural libraries have only one critical problem with this typical user: National employment and lifestyle trends make her an endangered species.

By the year 2000, "80 percent of all mothers will have a career during some portion of their child-rearing years," and 85 percent of work force entrants will be minorities, women, and new immigrants (Vanderkolk & Young, 1991, pp. 11, 20). As demonstrated by decades of relocations of light manufacturing and service firms, footloose employers regard rural, working age, high school educated women who will work for reasonable, and even low (by urban standards), salaries as a valuable labor commodity to be snapped up wherever possible. Business relocations to small towns and rural areas almost always include her as a primary labor target.

When homemaking women take on a full-time job, they work the same long hours as men: one-fourth of America's full-time work force—both male and female—say they are on the job forty-nine hours a week. As women become full-time workers, the weekly time they spend on housework declines from an average of fifty-five hours to between fifteen to

twenty-five hours (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990, pp. 97-99; Vanderkolk & Young, 1991, p. 44). Even with this cutback, working women spend far longer at household and family tasks than do their male mates.

Struggling to keep up with work and family, women usually sacrifice their discretionary time, including that used for leisure reading. St. Louis Public Library already has seen the effects of women working, as fiction circulation has declined from well over 60 percent in the mid-1980s to perhaps 57 or 58 percent of the total in 1994. As fiction circulation has fallen relatively, self-help and job-related book and magazine use has risen.

Rural libraries need to consider carefully about staking their futures on their traditional "homemaker" market group, which, at the very least, is growing short on time, and which, in the near future, may enter or re-enter the full-time work force.

At-Home Workers

The fastest growing employment sector in America is home employment. Between 15 and 20 percent of American workers are now employed in "mobile offices"—that is, they operate out of their own homes. Many of these are knowledge workers who have specific information needs (Shellenbarger, 1994, pp. B1, B7).

At-home workers are frequently information seekers who make heavy use of libraries to obtain magazines, government documents, and business information. Serving a population which includes many individuals subjected to recent layoffs, St. Louis Public Library has faced a growing demand for library mediators who help home workers find the information they need. Such workers take special delight in establishing a research-reference relationship with their "personal librarian."

At-home workers already have infiltrated rural libraries. *North and South Trilogy* author John Jakes is typical. Along with his home in New York, Jakes and his wife regularly reside in Hilton Head, South Carolina. While there, they conduct a great deal of their research at the public library in nearby Beaufort (John Jakes, personal communication, June 27, 1993).

Megatrends 2000 authors John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene (1990) summarize the work-at-home trend this way:

Linked by telephones, fax machines, Federal Express, and computers, a new breed of information worker is reorganizing the landscape of America. Free to live almost anywhere, more and more individuals are deciding to live in small cities and towns and rural areas. A new electronic heartland is spreading throughout developed countries around the globe, especially in the United States. (p. 304)

As the urban-suburban business exodus continues, many rural libraries can expect an increase in the reading and research demands of at-home workers. This is an articulate constituency which can help catalyze

a dynamic future for a sedate rural library. No pathway of future service deserves more consideration in a resources-short rural community trying to find inexpensive mechanisms to trigger the growth of area businesses.

Senior Citizens

An "age wave" is sweeping across America, and rural sections of the country are among its chief beneficiaries. "By 2025, Americans over 65 will outnumber teenagers by more than two to one. . . . By the year 2050, it's likely that as many as one in four Americans will be over 65" (Dychtwald, 1989, p. 21).

In small towns throughout rural America, the result of the "age wave" already is apparent. New country and workout clubs, health food stores, and retirement communities are appearing on small-town streets. Little market-town banks plan world tours for area seniors. And Bloomington, Minnesota's, Mall of America successfully promotes shopping excursions for well-heeled seniors from the small towns of Wisconsin, Iowa, and the Dakotas.

These developments signal a healthier longer-lived group of seniors than at any time in the nation's history. Their choice for recreation is "exactly the kind of recreational activities that today's retirees enjoyed while they worked" (Dychtwald, 1989).

Activist retirees already are challenging rural libraries. Their energetic pursuit of activities and their need for sophisticated information regarding finance, investments, travel, and other personal decisions can challenge even the best trained and most experienced public library reference librarian. Some of these newcomers already have served as catalysts to transform rural libraries. Others are on their way.

Meanwhile, in poor and very isolated areas where urban retirees have not brought dynamic change, rural libraries still need to address the specialized needs of seniors. Generally, such populations face these conditions:

fewer institutional services available, greater distances to travel to services and shopping, lower crime rate, lower per-capita income, less-healthy individuals (perhaps because average age is higher), distance from children greater, more widows, quality of housing lower because it is older, lower population density, neighbors at greater distance, and fewer alternative means of housing (e.g., apartments and retirement homes). (Hales-Mabry, 1993, pp. 54-55)

Because many elderly have physical challenges requiring special facilities, collections, and services, the Americans with Disabilities Act has special significance for rural libraries. Such changes are of great importance, especially if a rural library takes seriously its equity role (American Library Association, 1990; RASD, 1987).

Senior citizens are a growing rural-library constituency. Vavrek (1993) found that 33 percent of surveyed rural respondents wanted more services for the elderly at their libraries (p. 26). The statistic suggests an increasing service demand.

Children

Childhood has changed—for the worse. Louv (1990) writes that childhood has been redefined by a broad “expansion of experience and the contraction of positive adult contact....Children and adults pass each other in the night at ever-accelerating speeds, and the American social environment becomes increasingly lonely for both” (p. 5).

This broad shift has been hard on America’s children. The Children’s Defense Fund 1994 yearbook summarizes some of the changes. One of the most important is in children’s reading levels. Among Missouri public school fourth graders surveyed in 1989, for example, only 71 percent of whites and 33 percent of blacks were reading at their grade level. The same study found that only 22 percent of Native American children in Arizona read at their grade level. In South Carolina, only 49 percent of all children of whatever race read at the present grade level (p. 99). The situation was not good for any state, whether dominated by urban or rural patterns of living.

The Children’s Defense Fund (1994) studies provide other summaries of children’s conditions as well. In the United States in 1992, 1,987,000 children were eligible for Head Start. The nation was able to serve less than 36 percent of them (p. 92). In 1992, 13,349,000 children were in families that received food stamps. The number was up almost 42 percent since 1989 (p. 95). The same source reported 196,000 children living in group quarters “due to [their] own or family problems” (p. 90), 438,000 children living in foster care (p. 89), and 2,695,000 children were “reported abused or neglected” (p. 88).

Rural residents recognize that children’s problems are not confined to America’s cities. That is why 18 percent of respondents in the Clarion University survey wanted their rural libraries to provide day care as part of their services (Vavrek, 1993, p. 26), even though the demand was not tied into books, reading, or literacy.

Rural areas already have made responses to the plight of children. The Surry County Literacy Council, located in South Carolina’s rural Northwest Piedmont, operates a successful Reading is Fundamental program (Reading is Fundamental, 1991, p. 51). Home-schoolers, dissatisfied with rural educational quality, make heavy use of public libraries (Scheps, 1993). And the “Sharing Our Resources” program in rural Vermont makes rural public libraries into cornerstone institutions that support the efforts of teachers and schools (*Check This Out*, 1988, pp. 11-12).

Louv (1990) says that public libraries will be forced to make still greater changes to accommodate the nation’s loss of childhood. He writes that libraries will come to be looked to as “the last safe place” and as volunteer “family hubs” which will take on surrogate school and parent roles (pp. 5, 325-29). This shift will make children and students—along with researchers and pleasure readers—the most numerous in building users of public libraries (O’Brien, 1989, p. 29).

Inadequately funded schools, overworked teachers, and two-job parents are searching everywhere for another institution to help them cope with children and/or juvenile charges. If rural libraries are going to sustain library and information services for their communities, they need to consider carefully how they will define "a family hub" or other child serving programs.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY: EXPECTATIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, THREATS, AND COSTS

Expectations about Current Information

"Everything's up to date in Kansas City" assert the lyrics of one song from the musical *Oklahoma*. In the early twentieth century, electric lights and the telephone measured city-style progress in rural areas. Now the measure is consumer electronics, which can transform even the most isolated rural families into expectant observers and plugged-in participants into information-age communication. Such families are reshaping the demand for rural library service.

A West Coast author (Aleshire, 1993) conveys the enormous impact that electronic innovations have had on the American home:

98 percent of all U.S. homes have one television set and 65 percent have two or more television sets; 78 percent of all households own a videocassette recorder and 30 percent own two or more VCRs; more than 60 percent subscribe to cable television. Furthermore, 98 percent have telephone service, 46 percent have a telephone answering machine, 31 percent have Nintendo, 17 percent have a camcorder, and 33 percent have a personal computer. (pp. 1, 16-18)

Although no recent breakthroughs have motivated such huge buying surges as did automobiles, radios, or televisions, the U.S. consumer electronics market still grows by nearly \$30 billion (4.3 percent) a year. One fast-selling product is books on tape. Audiobook sales totaled \$1.2 billion in 1993, up 40 percent from the previous year (Levy & Smilgis, 1994, p. 73).

The consumer electronics revolution long ago reached rural areas. Though backward telephone companies may still limit their rural customers to rotary dials, powerful satellite dishes dot the yards of farm and small-town homes. And, if some Ozarks "holler" families still do not have electricity or a phone, other physically isolated rural families run their farms and service businesses with the help of online computers.

When watching the latest other-side-of-the-world upheaval on satellite or cable television, listening to the latest CD, or tuning into the British Broadcasting Company on public radio, consumer electronics product users expect currency in news, entertainment, and styles of delivering service.

Vavrek (1990) reports the results for rural libraries. First, "the [rural] library is apparently not considered as the resource for information of a timely nature" (p. 27). Second, 37 percent want the newer format books-on-tape along with books and magazines. And third, 48 percent of rural residents expect their libraries to provide them with "information technology"—just like that they believe they would find in up-to-date Kansas City (Vavrek, 1993, pp. 25-27). The *Oklahoma* song lyric is a good reminder to rural library policymakers that customer expectations about currency are a growing factor in technology and collection expenses.

A recent Urban Libraries Council study from seventy-nine large libraries reported that electronic materials, which had occupied 4 percent of their collections budgets in 1990 would occupy 18 percent of that budget by the year 2000 ("Paper Format...", 1994, p. 2). Well run rural libraries are likely to meet easily this conservative change marker.

PRIVATE SECTOR COMPETITION

It is not a given that citizens will turn to rural libraries—or to any public library—for electronic information or for the most current information. Writing on developments in private sector business, Davis and Davidson (1991) conclude: "When existing industry participants neglect the information dimensions of their business, for whatever reasons, independent third parties emerge to fill this role" (p. 96).

If the rural library makes no effort to become a principal community position resource for current information and lifelong learning, then rural residents who have the means will find private sector alternatives.

One of these is CompuServe which, over a computer modem and telephone line network, offers access to "news, stock quotes, travel arrangements, movie and restaurant reviews, shopping, and an online encyclopedia." In addition, it allows basic rate subscribers two electronic mail messages a day. And, CompuServe has "added *The American Heritage Dictionary*, the *Consumer Reports Complete Drug Reference*, *Soap Opera Summaries*, and the *Hollywood Hotline*." In many American libraries, such publications are big draws for the current-reader crowd.

The price for CompuServe service is generally affordable. Under \$9.00 monthly, it is less than the cost of most household television cable fees (CompuServe, 1993) and certainly cheaper than even a single hard-back book.

Another online public library competitor is PRODIGY which, along with allowing customers to select their own airline reservations and trade stocks, organizes online bulletin board conversations with well-known authors like Paul Andrews and Sue Grafton. Isolated libraries could easily organize participation in these conversations for local fans of these and other authors.

PRODIGY also features a book column, written by Digby Diehl, a columnist for *Playboy* and *Good Morning America*. He says the response to his electronic column is exciting. "I've worked for magazines and newspapers, but I had never experienced the response that I received from readers on PRODIGY. I was impressed with both the intimate understanding and the fun they have with books" ("Sue Grafton Online," 1993, p. 16).

PRODIGY, CompuServe, and the other online companies still are too awkwardly designed and too "techy" to capture a mass market. But their subscription numbers are growing, and online services are always searching for new ways to obtain users. It is not a far reach to suggest that some online information service soon will begin offering to lend single books, videos, and books-on-tape for a fee. Or such companies could create subscription pricing for customers who want certain categories of materials sent immediately to them.

In other words, rural libraries already have competitors trying to capture their best customers—i.e., middle and upper income families who pay the bulk of residential property taxes in any political subdivision. Anyone who is certain that for a fee, online library and information services could not replace rural libraries may want to recall how, during the 1970s, "free" television representatives proclaimed firmly that Americans would never pay for cable television even while cable companies were installing their first cable boxes.

Electronic competition is one of the major business challenges which the staff and trustee leadership of every rural library needs to understand as a matter of defining the future of their institution.

RURAL LIBRARIES: SOME STATISTICAL BASICS

Rural Libraries' Relative Importance

Rural libraries, generally defined as those serving under 25,000 patrons, are numerically the most significant category of American public libraries. In 1992, the rural cohort constituted 79.6 percent of all American public libraries, almost exactly the same percentage as it had in the previous two years (Chute, 1994, p. 42; 1993, p. 41; 1992, p. 37). The significance of rural libraries even within "urban states" is striking. Illinois, for example, claims that nearly 50 percent of its libraries serve populations under 5,000 ("Public Library Statistics...", 1994, p. 6).

Growth in Number

The Department of Education reports that rural library numbers (those serving populations under 25,000) increased from 6,972 in 1989 to 7,218 in 1991, then dropped to 7,118 in 1992 (Podolsky, 1991, p. 25;

Chute, 1993, p. 41; 1994, p. 42). Summarizing over the four years, the number of rural libraries rose by 3 percent. The 1991-92 data suggest that a decline may have begun. Only further counts will provide sure indications.

Given the expansion of exurban and rural populations in recent decades, a growth in the number of libraries might be expected, especially with the availability of federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) funds to subsidize new buildings. With LSCA construction funds now out of the federal largess, and with state government budgets tightening, the building of new rural libraries has become more problematical.

Funding

Funding levels for rural libraries are lower on a per capita basis than for urban libraries. In 1992, per capita funding for all public libraries averaged \$18.73 while per capita support for all rural libraries averaged \$17.19 (Chute, 1994, p. 73).

Per capita funding was higher for libraries serving less than 1,000 persons (\$19.03) and for libraries serving 10,000 to 25,000 persons (\$19.04). But the libraries serving populations in between—a vast majority of rural libraries—had per capita support two or three dollars less than the national average (Chute, 1994, p. 73).

Rural funding shortages are legion. They are of special consequence currently because, along with older better understood expenses like salaries, books, and building maintenance, rural library budget makers need to add items for information technology machinery, communications networks, and software and media collections.

The problem of low per capita support and relatively small budgets is fundamentally related to the American tradition of local taxation to support local government services. It also is related to the historically low rate of taxes on rural land, farm equipment, and out buildings. These realities mean that many rural librarians operate as poor cousins even as state sales taxes from a new small-town Walmart store are used to build roads and bridges, and multinational corporations operate million dollar feedlot operations within their taxing districts.

Some rural library districts are poor because their districts are poor. Others are poor because their constituencies, who have the means to do so, choose not to support their libraries. Still others have funds because they have won solid tax support from middle-income and business constituencies. And then there are those groups which are in states where some equalization formula serves to provide a solid base of public income that evens out relative wealth and poverty for local library units. In short, there is no one rural library funding problem.

Lack of public knowledge about library budgets is another serious rural library problem. Most library tax district constituents do not have the foggiest notion of how rural public libraries get or spend their money.

In the private sector, when there is no money, businesses close. As public budgets continue to tighten through the 1990s, a lot of America's public libraries, including rural libraries, will be left with limited financial options. These include asking voters for more money, lobbying for larger government tax equalization schemes, cutting certain types of services, rationing services, finding cheaper ways to operate (often involving sharing expenses and benefits with other agencies), or closing in anticipation that other agencies will provide the same or similar services.

Township governments, rural business, rural colleges, rural public school districts, and rural churches all have watched as their funding base declined and in some cases disappeared. All rural library financial problems are made worse because they need to invest now in information-age technology and electronic information products which their constituents want and expect.

Spending and Staffing Patterns

Rural libraries apportion their smaller budgets in different ways than larger libraries. The biggest difference is that they spend a smaller proportion on staff and more on collections.

In 1992, the smallest cohort of rural libraries, those serving under 1,000 persons, spent 47 percent of their funding on staff and 23 percent on collections. The 1,000 to 2,499 cohort spent 53 percent on staff and 22 percent on collections. The 2,500 to 4,999 cohort spent 57 percent on staff and 19 percent on collections. And the 5,000 to 9,999 cohort spent 61 percent on staff and 28 percent on collections. Nationally, the figures were 65 percent and 15 percent (Chute, 1994, p. 73).

To summarize, those libraries with the smallest budgets spent the smallest proportions of those budgets on staff. That is not an accident. That is a policy choice.

The relatively low percentages of total budget spent on staff helps explain the low number of library professionals found in rural libraries. The percentage of total full-time equivalents in rural libraries with an ALA-accredited MLS ranges from 2.5 percent for libraries serving less than 1,000 persons to 19.5 percent serving populations of from 10,000 to 24,999 (Chute, 1994, p. 29). By way of comparison, St. Louis Public Library, with 250 full-time employees, has about 22 percent professional staff. A quick search of any recent set of public library staffing reports shows that, while many larger high-circulation suburban systems carry proportionately fewer professionals, rural libraries still are significantly lower in this important employment category.

To sum up, the boards of trustees of rural libraries have made conscious budget decisions, first to spend less overall on staff, and second, to employ less well-trained staff. In other words, rural libraries have maximized books and minimized their institutional ability to offer skilled professional library service.

These have been critical decisions. Rural library budget makers have created libraries short on trained professional leadership. Where will they turn for library and information science expertise as they attempt to work out pathways to a bright institutional future?

SETTING A PATHWAY TO THE FUTURE

Leadership

Rural libraries have no automatic claim to their future. They must have outstanding leaders who will make effective decisions that will balance cost, collections, and technology in a way that will make their work significant to those who pay taxes in their communities.

Two groups need to be educated—staff and trustees. Regarding professional staff, Vavrek (1990) writes: “It is no longer feasible to assume that the modern public library is capable of existing....[without] the most qualified, academically trained staff” (p. 37).

Training for rural library staff has not been easy to get for even the most conscientious staff members, especially those whose travel is limited by economic circumstance or family responsibilities. Rural library boards, in many cases, have minimized professional travel and conference education of staff. Meanwhile, universities have been cutting back on the number of library schools—and that means reduced educational opportunities in many states.

There are other problems. Well-intentioned ALA library school accreditation policies have limited library and information science school extension offerings even when a few faculty were inclined to be entrepreneurial. And university extension course policies often have worked to the same end.

The result of all of these decisions—the long-term neglect of training opportunities for thousands of rural library staff—is, as I have stated elsewhere, one of the great embarrassments of the library profession (Holt, 1993a, pp. 41-62; 1993b).

The tools exist to make professional training in librarianship more widely available. The state-based educational corporations associated with the Online Computerized Library Center (OCLC) have done much to promote technical services training throughout many states. As OCLC moves into more public service librarian and end-user products like EPIC and First Search, OCLC-related training undoubtedly will expand.

Within recent years, Emporia State’s distance education project has brought a library degree into driving distance for many rural and small-town library staff members. And at least one sophisticated television-based distance education program already exists in librarianship (Holt, 1993a). As interactive television and computing opportunities increase, rural librarians should find it easier to obtain the training they will need to operate twenty-first century libraries.

The education of library trustees is another matter. Young (1992), along with her book on trusteeship (now about to go into its fifth edition), has written a helpful starting essay for small library trustees looking for a policymaking overview.

Williams's (1993) book, now in its second edition, has accomplished the same task for Canadian trustees. In her introduction to Williams's book, Young writes: "The essence of effective library service lies with those persons who care enough to ask and to know, to plan and to execute, and to understand profoundly why" (in Williams, 1993, p. vi).

At the end of her book, Williams issues a call to trustees which might well be regarded as a declaration for the education of rural library trustees. Addressing trustees, she writes:

Many trustees today sincerely believe they are providing services when in fact they are only involved in tokenism. Look at any area you care to—services to persons with physical or developmental handicaps, services for multilingual and multicultural users, services for native Indian communities, services for literacy and the business community—and ask yourself if you have any idea of the standards needed for adequate service to those constituencies. A deeper understanding of these services will make us, boards and librarians, more open to providing these services. We'll view them not as frills, something to do in order to jump on the bandwagon, but as part of an overall obligation we have to serve all citizens. (p. 152)

Such concerns need to be at the heart of trustee leadership for rural libraries.

A Vision of Change: The Imperative of Connectivity

No public library can do everything. But one thing that all modern public libraries have to do is to introduce information technology into their ways of doing business.

In her pamphlet on rural library trusteeship, Young (1992) writes:

Computers, telecommunications, fiber optics and packet switchings are all terms that have settled securely into library lingo. It is no longer an area that is reserved to the large and the medium-sized library. In even a small library a microcomputer might well pay for itself in terms of procedures and routines that could be computerized, with a resulting savings in staff time and, in most instances, a streamlining of many aspects of the library service program. . . . Technology is an area that the local trustee and staff should investigate with an eye to maximizing both the library's resources and services. (p. 8)

A few years ago, the library entry point into information technology was to buy a computer. But change has been quick. Today, institutional entry is a computer, modem, and network connectivity. The latter needs to be achieved on wide bands and at high speeds (Lynch, 1992, p. 110).

Drabenstott (1994) writes: "Interconnectivity...is the basis for much more powerful services that will enable end users to integrate access to information resources more conveniently into their everyday activities" (p. 19). Today's cheapest connection almost always is on the Internet. A mid-1994 policy study (McClure et al., 1994) shows that rural libraries are woefully behind in making use of this inexpensive network.

The Internet already has demonstrated its benefits to rural dwellers (Stone-Martin & Breeden, 1994). An Internet connection allows North Dakota's rural communities to peruse the world's library catalogs (pp. 111-12). It makes it possible for West Virginia rural school students to receive science instruction from professors associated with the Boston Museum of Science (pp. 101-02). It lets rural Wyoming schools and libraries access each other and state university databases (pp. 71-72). It makes possible the sharing of University of Oklahoma distance education classes with isolated schools in Oklahoma (pp. 61-62)—and nearby Missouri schools as well. In New Hampshire, it provides "an off-hours key to the Library" (pp. 55-56).

A connection with the Internet is a network starting point. The number of machines connected with it now has reached 3.2 million, an 81 percent increase over one year. Much of the Internet's growth is international ("Internet Growth...," 1994, p. 122). As with every library tool, the Internet has its benefits (relatively cheap access to all sorts of communications, reference, and subject specialists, and databases) and its weaknesses (relative slow speed, the public nature of many communications, arcane search features, along with the astonishingly bad manners and male chauvinism of many of its most avid users).

But limits are only that, and they do not overcome an increasing necessity: The first step on the rural library pathway to tomorrow's library service is to get the institution connected to the Internet. Rural libraries without connectivity ought to find the money for the new expense and/or pressure their state legislators, advocate with their public service commission regulators, and nag their state libraries until they get the connection, training, and support to make good use of it.

Redefining Access

Computers and networks can help rural libraries act like big libraries on a limited budget. From a single personal computer over a general or dedicated network, a knowledgeable rural librarian can help any one customer obtain access to world class information sources. The end result is to redefine the library so that it offers optimal rather than minimal service.

To accomplish this goal, however, it will be necessary for most rural library leaders to redefine access. Libraries have always been about access. A still useful definition states: "Access to a potentially informative document [including fiction books] depends on identifying, locating, and having affordable physical access to it" (Buckland, 1992, p. 2).

So long as single paper copies of books and articles dominated libraries, all libraries, including small rural libraries, were limited to providing the copy they had. In that setting, libraries bought what books they could, they put them on shelves, and users checked them out.

Interlibrary loan modified this access process by using available technologies—at first typewriters, telephones, and mail trucks—to order and transport a book or paper item from a holding library to another library where it was needed.

Computers and networks have hastened this process while lowering costs and expanding materials availability. As a result, library leaders, including those in rural libraries, can balance assets and access. They can do that by buying less materials and by planning to use information technology to borrow more items electronically (Higginbotham & Bowdoin, 1993).

To sum up, networked computing allows rural libraries to engage in a new level of resource sharing that benefits their customers. Provided they are trained to know how to make an electronic system work to its fullest capacity, rural librarians can provide their specialized customers with access to a world of information while purchasing the books and magazines which they are certain their customers will use heavily. In this way, heavy user groups and specialized researchers can be served optimally within the library's budget limits.

Using Information Technology as an Outreach Tool

Another use of information technology is as a tool for outreach and service. In this application of technology, the rural library becomes the hub or switchboard matching connections with distant databases with the needs of constituent customers. Although writing about the university setting, Kibbey and Evans (1989) state exactly the needs of the rural public library when they write: "The ideal electronic library is not a single entity where everything is stored. It is a range of services and collections made accessible through networks" (p. 16).

The concept of the ideal library becomes richer by using technology as outreach tools to serve local area constituents, including those who are poor, small in number, or very isolated.

St. Louis Public Library, in its LibraryLink project begun in 1989, has relied heavily on information technology to provide equity access for small and isolated user groups. By 1994, St. Louis Public Library catalogs could be found at more than twenty-four sites, including all inner-city magnet high schools, two inner-city YMCAs, a settlement house educational facility, the anteroom to the aldermanic chamber at City Hall, and Ranken Technical College.

This outreach program has treated the catalogs as automated teller machines, open whenever the partnership institution is open. Staff from the institutions were trained to make extensive use of the search platform and database provided.

At nearly the same time, the library turned on its dial-in Desktop Library. This service now accounts for 10 percent of the library's cardholders and about 15 percent of monthly reserve requests. By the time this article is published, computerized full texts of magazine articles will be available in all branches; it will be mounted on the desktop dial-in network in mid or late 1995.

Rural libraries can use technology the same way. They can build on the vision of universal remote access, offering the resources of a virtual library networked to include the contents and services of many different libraries and other information sources (Gapen, 1993, p. 1; Landoni et al., 1993, p. 176). Providing off-site terminals, giving dedicated modem access software to schools, churches, and civic agencies, as well as small businesses; and operating a high tech infomobile as a bookmobile are among the countless ways to use technology to help build pathways to improved services for rural libraries.

Civic Networks

Another possible technology based service for rural libraries is an electronic community information system or "civic network." Already established civic networks demonstrate how small libraries can provide information to many users at relatively low cost.

Under the leadership of computing departments at state universities, a few state libraries, state and local government officials, and some public libraries, civic networks have become a burgeoning business in both urban and rural America. Funded and controlled by public agencies, civic networks provide a variety of services—e.g., lists of tourist attractions, various license renewals, community job information, draft legislation, phone numbers of "helping" agencies, utility maps, and requests for books and magazines from the library.

A few civic networks have gone statewide. The networks in Maine, West Virginia, and Minnesota include isolated dwellers in rural areas as a matter of policy (Lowe, 1993).

Rural public libraries occasionally have been full participants in the operation of many such networks. In Missouri, Columbia Public Library operates a three-county dial-in network, and Springfield-Greene County Public Library operates one used by populations of many Missouri and Arkansas rural areas. At the same time, however, "sobering examples of the disconnection between civic networks and public libraries are also evident" (Molz, 1994).

Civic networks offer a bright prospecting and service tool by which rural libraries can reach out electronically to provide information that area customers want and need. Along with being a useful service, organization of, and/or major participation in, such a network has the additional advantage of helping rural libraries obtain higher visibility as an important community "player" among community influentials (Vavrek, 1990, pp. 33-36). Rural library leadership needs to give civic networks a hard look.

CUSTOMER RESEARCH AND MARKETING

Working with people who walk through the library door every day can be as limiting as it is eye opening. In preparing for the future, rural library leaders need to keep a sharp eye on noncustomers.

At the 1993 ALA convention, Beach (1993), of Edgecombe County Memorial Library in Tarboro, North Carolina, stated the "first task" of rural librarians: "Get to know—really know your library through the eyes of your users," she told the audience.

Vavrek (1990, p. 17) is pessimistic about how this part of rural library work is going. In a 1987 survey, he found that only 30 percent of rural libraries had completed any kind of community survey in the previous five years.

At the same ALA session at which Beach appeared, Reed (1993) told how a single librarian in a rural northern New England town used the findings of a well-constructed survey to persuade a hard headed board of trustees that their library had to have more funding to meet the vital needs of constituents. Reed reported that this finding out phase turned easily into "cultivation" and permanently setting up open communication channels to tell the library's story, including its financial need. Reed summarized the process:

I want to impress on you how important it is to cultivate all the people in the community. We had done a good job in building coalitions with our users. . . . But, we had done a poor job in building coalitions with our town governors who understood so little what the library meant to their constituents that they didn't bother to object to our plans initially because they didn't seriously believe we could pass a bond or raise a tax. . . . When you need to generate quick support for an immediate need, you will have the best success if you are turning to community members, both users and nonusers, whom you have cultivated, cared for, and communicated with regarding the importance of the public library in the fabric of the community.

To sum up, in an age when information technology is as great a competitive threat as it is a policy tool, ignorance is not bliss; it is an invitation to a future disaster.

On the other hand, marketing studies of a constituency allow not only targeted service but cultivation, whether of voters for a tax increase or donors to support a library's special program.

LIBRARY BUSINESS TACTICS FOR THE 1990s

Urban and rural alike, library customers have grown more particular. This section analyzes some of the most important current trends in customer expectations as they apply to rural libraries.

Customization of Services

As consumers over the past half decade or so, public library customers already have been trained to expect customized services. Examples abound: Gas stations save customers three to four minutes by putting

ATM style credit card readers on the gas pumps so customers do not have to go inside and wait in line (Solomon, 1993, pp. B1, B5). Hertz, at some locations, has counter computers that let their customers print out exact routes between airports and hotels. And mailing companies provide fine grained zip sorts and time drops that astonish by their relative cheapness and the levels of customer response they generate.

Much of the customized service revolution is accomplished with a tool familiar to most libraries—the multistriped bar code. The ugly little bars have revolutionized food purchasing, warehouse storage, check writing, library check out, just-in-time auto parts delivery, and UPS package delivery to name only a few areas (Dunn & Dunn, 1993; Finley, 1993).

Even traditional library automation systems provide opportunities for libraries to begin thinking about how to customize service, a feature of life which customers have come to expect. With advance permission, libraries large and small can notify regular patrons about forthcoming publications; can place automatic reserves for regular customers; prepare a specialized index of magazine articles from which business users can electronically order full text; and mail invitations to segments of the citizenry who are most likely to want to attend special programs.

To sum up, modern library patrons expect customized services. Rural libraries that provide customized services will be cultivating a growing base of enthusiastic users.

Lifelong Learning and Citizenship

Rural libraries have a long way to go to meet the needs of lifelong learners and decision-makers in a democracy. Nonusers especially perceive that the library has reference books and best-sellers. It is seen as a far less useful place in providing information on local government and social services. Vavrek (1990) writes: "The transformations have yet to be made in converting the typical rural library to a community information center" (p. 28).

The consumer electronics market already has started to move into the library's information strongholds. Customer trends in encyclopedia purchasing illustrate the phenomenon. "In 1994, families with multimedia personal computers are expected to snap up 3 million CD-ROM encyclopedias. But only 500,000 to 700,000 print encyclopedias will be sold, perhaps half the number of five years ago."

There are two big reasons for the shift. First, good electronic encyclopedias are quicker and easier to use than paper volumes. Second, the electronic encyclopedias sell for \$99. The book-version *World Book* lists at \$679; the *Britannica* starts at \$1,800. Among all electronic encyclopedias, the best-seller is not from an old encyclopedia company but *Encarta* by Microsoft (Langberg, 1994, p. 5C).

Encyclopedias have always sold best to people who see themselves as lifelong learners—or who hope to make their children into lifelong learners. Learning also is the theme for electronic products for children. Along with *Encarta* for children, there is *The Body Illustrated* for teens and *Gettysburg Multimedia Battle Simulation* for military strategy students of all ages (Armstrong, et al., 1994, pp. 80-88; Flynn, 1994, 68-70). When well reviewed learning tools like these show up in retail stores, it will not be long before those who regard the library as a learning place will expect to see them there.

Whether it is through the development of new services, shifts in collections purchases, or provision for electronic products, rural libraries can use new tools to help meet the information needs of lifelong learners.

Addressing Equity Issues

From its beginnings, the American public library has had an equity commitment. In 1993 and again in January 1994, St. Louis Public Library marketing surveys revealed that a wide proportion of its public wanted the institution to address the service inequities of its older buildings, help children with school work, help fight illiteracy, and continue a high level of outreach services to the elderly and preschoolers. In addition, the surveys showed that St. Louisans wanted their library to comply both with the letter and spirit of the Americans for Disabilities Act. Enhancing these equity programs became an important issue in the library's most recent successful tax campaign (Melman & Lazarus, 1993; Midwest Research & Telephone Contact, Inc., 1994).

The ADA mandate is a healthy one. Speaking at a recent conference, Esquith (1993), senior ADA policy analyst for the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation, noted: "The ADA is going to create new solutions to old problems, and part of the spin-off benefit to everyone is increased cooperation among agencies, among libraries, among anyone who has anything to do with the ADA" (p. xi).

ADA, therefore, presents rural libraries not with a problem but with an opportunity to examine their buildings and their services so they will operate in compliance with the new law. For many libraries, working with this opportunity already has allowed the improvement of services, including greater cooperation with other public and private agencies (Crispen, 1993, pp. 27-54).

Business Accountability

At all levels of government, there is increased competition for public revenues. When the public economy is tight, there always are demands for more accountability and an increase in productivity.

This reality translates into a call for all public libraries, no matter what their size, to begin accounting for their costs in public documents rather than by attempting to make their case with anecdotes and letters from grateful customers who then forget to vote yes in district tax elections.

College and university libraries already have had to undertake cost accounting, and the Library of Congress has been reprimanded for poor cost controls, including those in collections development (Cochrane & Warmann, 1989, pp. 55-57; "GAO Audit...", 1991, p. 830). As anyone who has ever done fund-raising or has campaigned for a tax increase knows, memorable word pictures are wonderful for making great first impressions, but increasingly libraries get asked hard business questions as well.

Just like other libraries, rural libraries face increasing pressures to go beyond traditional "output measures" to account for the totality of institutional work. The challenge will be to demonstrate benefits to voters through cost benefit and other value analysis (Sakaiya, 1991).

Rural librarians and boards of directors must pay special attention to the ways in which they conduct their business. Rightfully upset over stories about waste and mismanagement by government agencies, library district voters should expect nothing less.

Resource Sharing

Operating accountability will eventually force resource sharing on all public libraries. Financial pressures are increasing on large urban libraries and on university libraries to end free- or even cost reimbursement-loans to libraries from whom they do not have mutually benefiting relationships. In states which have state libraries unable financially, or unwilling as a matter of policy, to underwrite the costs of rural library net borrowing, free interlibrary loan is in considerable peril.

Other resource sharing opportunities are becoming available. Formal loan agreements among institutions making up primary members of civic networks form one opportunity. And rural net-lending networks can be found throughout the United States.

Federal policy mostly is abetting the trend to electronic resource sharing. The Government Printing Office, for example, is moving quickly to make much of its issuance available electronically, usually over guaranteed free dial-in connections at major government document depository libraries.

The national libraries also are moving in this direction. The Library of Congress already has started the movement to become the nation's electronic library serving libraries and end-users alike. And the National Library of Medicine continues to develop a wide range of up-to-date materials on public and personal health. Not all of these require a medical or biochemical doctorate to understand.

The National Library of Agriculture holds out special promise for sharing relevant resources with rural libraries. A visit to an NAL booth at any library convention always yields a handful of new services which they are delivering, mostly electronically, to county and small-town extension offices, schools, and libraries.

These trends are coming just in time, since as part of being well run, "we observe that the demand from our library patrons for quality resource sharing is clearly evident and real" (Baker & Jackson, 1993, p. 4).

FOCUSING ON THE JOB TO BE DONE

This article has been an examination of the forces and trends, the imperatives and the options, affecting the future of rural libraries. In ending this discussion, this author returns to where he began.

The rural library scene is a land of sharp contrasts—rich and poor, dynamic and stagnant, well-managed and foundering, deserving of a bright future and pathetically self-destructive. With so many thousand rural libraries serving the people of so many different locales in America, we should expect nothing less.

At the same time, we should not let the diversity of rural libraries confuse the reality of the plight which many of them face. Undoubtedly, many of them will follow the way of rural churches, rural one-room schools, and little towns like Elmo, Kansas, and pass out of existence.

But this fate is not universally predetermined. Public librarianship has never been a communitarian movement. Rather, each public library is the product of local civic pride, when citizens of a political subdivision set out to create for themselves the institution in their mind's eye.

Because all libraries, including public libraries, represent, and are constrained by, the citizenries of local governments, except where they can manage help from another entity, their fate is in their own hands. That means, quite simply, that unless local leaders and citizens see libraries as fulfilling a valued mission within their communities, these libraries have little chance of long-term survival. By the same reasoning, their future is in the hands of local librarians and local trustees who can refocus the institutional mission to meet the shifting needs of a changing constituency.

The history of public librarianship in America is one long tale of adaptation. Rural libraries that follow that story line—that find new uses for themselves in providing needed services to their own particular customer niches—undoubtedly will find ways to survive and prosper into the twenty-first century.

In the age of information technology, rural libraries have enormous potential. Those that have good leaders will have a bright future. Rural libraries must change. If they do not, they certainly will pass from the scene.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of Light, . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

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